

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Thursday 11 December 2003

Session 2

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## Scottish Parliament

Thursday 11 December 2003

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

### Public Services

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S2M-718, in the name of David McLetchie, on the reform of public services, and three amendments to the motion.

09:30

**David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con):** I do not dispute the fact that the Labour Government at Westminster and the Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive in Scotland have significantly increased spending on our public services and continue to do so. That is a matter of fact. This year, more than £7 billion is being spent on the national health service in Scotland, which is an increase of 30 per cent in cash terms and 18 per cent in real terms since 1999. Indeed, we spend almost 9 per cent of our gross domestic product—our annual national output—on health. That is the highest in the developed world according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. There have also been significant increases in spending on education. For example, spending per secondary pupil has gone up by 13 per cent during the past four years.

I am happy to acknowledge those facts. I just wish that some of those in other parties who call constantly for more honest and reasonable debate in Scotland would acknowledge that significant and real year-on-year increases in expenditure were also a feature of the last Conservative Government, when health spending went up by 58 per cent and spending per secondary pupil went up by 27 per cent in real terms.

However, what matters is not who spent what, but the standards and level of service that are provided to the public. That was recognised in the Labour Party's 1997 election manifesto, which said that

"the level of public spending is no longer the best measure of the effectiveness of government."

How true.

I do not want to bury today's debate in a deluge of statistics. Suffice it to say that in a wealthy country such as Scotland, and measured against what we pay in taxes, we cannot and should not

be satisfied with the length of time that patients have to wait to receive hospital treatment. We cannot be satisfied with the levels of attainment in many of our schools, and we should not tolerate the current levels of crime, especially violent crime, that plague far too many of our communities.

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm):** David McLetchie mentioned waiting times. Does he acknowledge that a maximum waiting time for in-patient treatment of nine months is a lot better than the maximum waiting time of 15 months that was achieved in the latter stages of the last Conservative Government?

**David McLetchie:** The Executive can set targets in maxima, and I do not want to get bogged down in statistics, but it is undeniable that waiting lists are longer than they were four years ago and—to use the First Minister's favourite word—median waiting times are also longer, despite the additional expenditure of £1.7 billion on health over four years. That suggests to me that something is fundamentally wrong. There is certainly something wrong if the Minister for Health and Community Care buries his head in the sand and refuses to acknowledge what is plain for all to see.

What is happening is happening not because of any lack of political will on the part of members in the chamber; I have never doubted for one second that every party represented in the Parliament shares the objective of ensuring that everyone in Scotland is guaranteed access to high-quality public services. The debate is about how we achieve that.

We should have the courage to admit that the quality of public services is superior in many other western European countries. For example, in relation to health, waiting lists for hospital treatment in countries such as France and Germany are virtually unheard of. Cancer survival rates are better. The OECD ranked the United Kingdom bottom of a list of 11 countries on the care of stroke victims. We were the only country to be classified as having a high death rate from that cause. We all have an obligation to ask ourselves why we are not obtaining better results and what we can do to improve the situation.

The structures of our public services are overly centralised and we require reform that moves away from central control and direction. That view is shared by those at the highest levels; no less an authority than Kofi Annan, secretary general of the United Nations, is quoted in the latest Scottish Council Foundation document "The Fifth Wave" as saying:

"centrally planned systems don't work."

Unfortunately, our health service still contains too many features of such centrally planned systems with centralised targets, centrally directed funding and rigid national terms and conditions of employment. That means that the system can develop only as a result of the decisions and commands of politicians and bureaucrats, and it cannot respond adequately to patients' demands.

That is why resources are misallocated and the extra money that is going into the system is not delivering better results. The rigidities in the NHS also mean that it is less innovative than comparable systems. That was borne out by the Wanless report, which found that, in comparison with the United States, Canada, France and Australia, the UK NHS was the worst at introducing new technologies that could make a difference to people's lives. We must seek to change some of those features.

For many people, the ultimate justification of the current structure of the NHS is that it is fair. However, even that must now be questioned. Earlier this year, when he was Secretary of State for Health, Alan Milburn told NHS chief executives:

"In fifty years health inequalities have widened not narrowed. Too often even today the poorest services tend to be in the poorest communities."

He was right, even if he has now retired in despair. Those who defend the status quo on public services are defending a model of entrenched inequality. It is a two-tier system.

If we are to improve our health service, the extra spending must be accompanied by genuine decentralising reform to create a more flexible and diverse system that puts patients first. That is in line with the analysis in reports from two highly respected independent think-tanks—the King's Fund and the Scottish Council Foundation—both of which urge a move away from one-size-fits-all systems and a celebration of diversity and greater responsiveness to the needs of individual patients and communities. The First Minister and Mr Chisholm claim to follow the same principles, yet there has been no sign that they are prepared to take the steps that are necessary to change fundamentally the relationship between the patient and the NHS.

We will begin to create a truly patient-centred health service only when we start to give all patients genuine choice, and therefore greater control over the treatment that they receive, by giving them real purchasing power. Anything else means that no matter how much consultation is involved, the ultimate decision is still at the discretion of the medical authorities. At present, health boards may send patients to other parts of Scotland or the UK for treatment, but patients can go only where they are sent. Ironically, that was one of Labour's main criticisms of our system of

general practitioner fundholding, in which patients had to follow the contract.

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** Accepting for the moment Mr McLetchie's proposition about choice, and given the consequent removal of resource from the public sector and the failure to build capacity, how will that help us to deal with inequalities in the public sector? That is something that the member criticised in relation to the current system.

**David McLetchie:** Our proposals are about shortening queues and not jumping queues. We are talking about building capacity by doing what is done in many western European countries—by having a higher level of overall spending and a better balance of provision between the state-funded sector and the independent sector. That is a feature of health care systems in all the countries to which I have referred. We are almost alone in having a monopolistic state-funded system. If we want improvement for all, we will have to lever in additional resources. I will expand on that point later.

At the moment, choice is available only to those who can afford to pay twice: once through their taxes and again through direct payment or insurance for private treatment for themselves or their families. That is why we believe that choice should be extended to everyone through a patient's passport. A patient would still enter the health system through their GP and consultant; however, once diagnosed, they would be able to take the standard tariff funding for their treatment anywhere within the NHS. Such an approach would ensure that money followed the patient's choice and would lead to a truly national health service, not a regional one in which access is determined by one's postcode.

Although many patients would undoubtedly choose a local hospital for their treatment, others would exercise a choice that was based on a shorter waiting time or on acknowledged expertise in another institution. What matters is not the basis for patient decisions, but the fact that the choice is in their hands. The GP's role would be to advise on comparative waiting times, outcomes and locations and to act as a professional advocate for patients.

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** The patient's passport is a very important issue. Is the member saying that it would act as a passport out of the NHS for people who could afford it? Has he estimated the amount of money that would be siphoned off from the NHS to provide for it?

**David McLetchie:** We would save money in the NHS and ensure that better provision was available to all by shortening queues and therefore

lessening demand on the service. We would also lever more money into the health service overall, because people would pay to supplement the 60 per cent rebate on the standard tariff that they would receive from the service. Overall, our approach would improve investment and expand the range of providers and services. That is what we want to achieve.

Schools face similar problems to those that are faced by the health service, with a one-size-fits-all system that is justified largely on the grounds that it is fairer and more equal. The reality has been very different. There is an enormous gulf between the best and the worst performing schools and, overwhelmingly, it is the children in our most deprived communities who are trapped in poor schools.

The solutions to the problems of our schools are, in essence, the same as those for health. Parental choice must be at the heart of the system. In Scotland, choice exists currently only for those who can afford it: the small number who can afford—and are prepared—to pay twice. That is obviously true of those who pay their taxes and then pay for independent education on top. However, it is equally true of those who use the state system but can afford higher mortgages to buy houses in the catchment areas of the best schools. As a result, we have a system that entrenches inequality and denies educational opportunities to the least well-off.

**Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab):** The Tories propose to introduce an education voucher system. Is the member aware that in England, where there is more of a market situation, some children have to travel more than 11 miles to the nearest school with an available space?

**David McLetchie:** If children have to travel to school—and their parents want them to—they should be free to do so. I find it difficult to understand why people in the Labour Party want to prescribe the schools that people should send their children to. It is quite illogical. The question whether to send their children to a particular school should be a matter for people's independent judgment. We should not tell them what to do.

We advocate a better schools passport, which would enable taxpayers' money to follow children to the schools of their parents' choice. That clarifies the role of the Government, which should be to act as the funder of education. However, the purchasing power would be transferred to parents. The passport would be equivalent in value to the current revenue cost of providing primary and secondary education, as well as a capital element that would allow popular schools to expand and new schools to be established.

Furthermore, a better schools passport would enable parents to send their children to any school—whether run by the council or by an independent educational trust—that was prepared to offer their child an education at a price equivalent to its value.

**George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD):** Will the member give way?

**David McLetchie:** I am sorry; I really must finish.

Such a measure would help to develop a network of state-funded but independently managed schools and extend choice beyond what is on offer from our councils. In other words, we want a Jordanhill that is for all parents in Scotland, not just for a few who happen to be Scottish Executive ministers.

Whether or not members of other parties agree with our proposals, they should at least recognise that, despite all the extra spending, the current structures are not meeting the needs of our people, particularly the less well-off. In looking for improvements, we should remember that the current systems were shaped in the aftermath of the war and were designed to deal with a different world from the one that we face today. That was a world of rationing, lower expectations and lower life expectancy.

**George Lyon:** Will the member give way?

**David McLetchie:** I am sorry; I am just winding up.

Times have changed and people are used to making—and expect to make—choices about all aspects of their lives. They are not content simply to accept their appointed lot—and rightly so. I believe that the same principle of choice should apply to our policy on public service delivery.

People expect this Parliament to debate and to come up with solutions to the big issues that we face. There is no bigger issue or responsibility than the state of our public services. This morning, we have kicked off a new and vigorous debate on the future provision of those services. [*Applause.*]

For that reason, I am pleased to move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the increased levels of spending on our public services, but notes that this has not been reflected in improved standards of service; recognises that fundamental reform is needed of public services in Scotland to achieve the standards of many other European countries and provide value for money for our taxpayers; calls, therefore, on the Scottish Executive to give patients genuine choice over the treatment they receive, establish foundation hospitals within the NHS in Scotland and promote the development of, and partnership with, the independent sector; calls on the Executive to expand choice and diversity in education by enabling taxpayers' money to follow children to the schools of their parents' choice and develop a network of state-funded but

independently managed schools, and further calls on the Executive to enhance local accountability in respect of the provision of police services by the direct election of conveners of police boards.

09:46

**The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock):** The Tories might well be cheering—albeit in a rather muted way—but they certainly will not be cheering when the Scottish people get their chance to give their verdict on the ludicrous policies that have been set out this morning. Despite David McLetchie's moderate tones, which were a velvet glove to disguise an iron fist, he has given us a glimpse back into the dark, awful days of Thatcherism that we had to suffer for many years. Indeed, his proposals signal something worse than that, if that can be imagined, and confirm the Tories' lurch to the extreme right under Michael Howard, who gave us the poll tax and made millions more people unemployed.

There the Tories are, hurtling back through time to collect the debris of their old policies, patch them together and try to put a new label on them.

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will the member give way?

**Peter Peacock:** I will take an intervention in a while. I want to get into my stride.

It does not matter whether the Tories put a new label on those policies: they are the same old failed Tory policies that we have seen time and again.

**Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Peter Peacock:** Please let me get into my stride. I will be happy to take some interventions in a moment.

The Tories have been in opposition for six years, but they have not thought up a single new idea in that time. Let us be clear: the policies that we have heard about this morning are designed not to improve Scottish public services, but to dismantle them and to abolish the comprehensive system of provision that we have established. David McLetchie made that very clear in a speech that he gave earlier this year.

**David McLetchie:** What is so wonderful about a system that has failed, by a significant margin, to meet the Executive's own target of ensuring that 80 per cent of children reach an appropriate standard of English reading, writing and arithmetic? What is so wonderful about a system that delivers such miserable results?

**Peter Peacock:** That is a complete misrepresentation of the position. Year on year,

we are seeing an improvement in the attainment levels of all children in the five-to-14 age group. We are picking up from the disastrous legacy and low attainment levels that the Tories left us when they left office.

The difference between the Tories and us is that the Tories do not believe in community or society; instead, they believe in individuals and markets. As David McLetchie made clear last week, they reject the socially just society that we seek to create. Their vision is of a world in which the strong survive and the weak go to the wall. As we have seen time and again, the Tory party is a party of social exclusion and privilege; it is interested only in the few. The truth about the Tories is that they want to force people into the private sector by running down Scottish public service. That forms the background to their policies.

We, in the Executive parties, believe in investment in and reform of our public services, not in the status quo, but the Tories believe in cuts and competition in our public services. We believe in excellent services for all, but the Tories believe in good services for the few, at the expense of the many. That is why we comprehensively and fundamentally reject their philosophy.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Does the minister accept that the people who suffer most in the current comprehensive school system are those who cannot afford private education and cannot afford to buy a house in the catchment area of a good school, but are trapped in the catchment areas of poor schools? Why does he not accept that those are the people who suffer under his policies?

**Peter Peacock:** I will consider the Tory education proposals in some detail, and Malcolm Chisholm will pick up on the health matters in his closing speech. My colleagues will help to demolish the other arguments that the Tories have flung in during the debate.

Today, like last Thursday night, David McLetchie paid hardly any attention to education. Last week's speech was 26 pages long—he will be delighted to know that I read it in close detail—but less than two pages focused on, or were devoted to, education. It is easy to see why he said so little about education, both last Thursday and today—it is because his proposals for education are superficial, ill-considered, unprincipled and completely unworkable. They are dangerous and simplistic policies that will penalise pupils, parents and, particularly, the poor in our society.

The Tory policies would starve most of our schools of funds in the interests of only those who can travel or start their own school—that represents choice as a substitute for excellence



throughout our education system. We should be clear that that is the Tories' policy intention; the policy is designed to mean choice for the few and chaos for the many. That is not an accident—the policy has been designed specifically to create a two-tier education system, in which only the few will benefit.

**Shona Robison:** I do not disagree with a word of the minister's analysis of the Tories. However, does the minister accept that he, too, is culpable because he accepted with gusto one of the Tory policies—use of the private finance initiative and public-private partnership projects? That has left schools in East Lothian in a state of chaos as a result of a private contractor going into administration.

**Peter Peacock:** The SNP, if it had the chance, would cancel all the projects that we have commissioned and stop the building of new schools in Scotland. However, we want to see progress and we are happy with the progress that is being made.

The Tories' policy on education is a policy for the privileged elite who have social mobility, can travel and can exercise choice. There would be another system for those who were left behind—those who cannot exercise choice and who do not have social mobility. The policies are born from David McLetchie's view, which he has made clear, that he regards education not as a public good, but as a private privilege.

In the brave new Tory world, each parent would get a passport—a voucher by any other name, as has already been said. The voucher would have equal value throughout Scotland—

**Mr Monteith:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Peter Peacock:** Let me finish the point, please.

Parents would take the voucher along to their local, or any other, school and demand to get in. The problem is that the answer may well be no, because the cost of education in that area is higher than the average cost in the rest of Scotland. In Shetland, Orkney, the Western Isles, most of the Highlands, most of Grampian, Argyll and Bute, the Borders, parts of Fife, the Angus glens and so on, the voucher would not buy people the education that they currently get. It is clearly not a policy for most of rural Scotland, where the average voucher value would not be sufficient.

**Mr Monteith:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Peter Peacock:** Let me finish the argument.

It is also not a policy for much of urban Scotland, because the costs of many schools in our more

deprived communities are also higher than average. The policy is designed not for most of rural Scotland or much of urban Scotland, but for the leafy suburbs, for the few and not for the many, and for those who can top up the value of the voucher.

**Mr Monteith:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Peter Peacock:** Where will the money come from to fund those schools in the leafy suburbs, the ones that the Tories want to be better? It will be taken from the many and given to the few.

I give way to Lord James.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Is the minister aware that his Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, made this recommendation:

"Why shouldn't good schools expand or take over failing schools or form federations?"

By implication, the minister is condemning his own Prime Minister.

**Peter Peacock:** On the contrary, the Labour Party, both north and south of the border, is committed to improving standards for all our children. We have always had a very distinctive Scottish system and will continue to do so.

The second reason why parents might be met with a no when they turn up with their voucher at the local school is that the school might already be full. Those parents might happen to get there later than parents who are more mobile.

Most parents in Scotland want their children to go to the local school, but under the Tories' policy there would no longer be school catchment areas; there would be a free market for school places. That would lead to a free-for-all and, most likely, to chaos. Brian Monteith has said that the Tories have solved the problem of full schools. Each passport would have a capital element to it, as David McLetchie indicated, which would mean that parents could get together and build extensions to schools, or entirely new schools. Anyone with an ounce of common sense knows that that proposal is complete and utter nonsense. There would be such minor practical considerations as land supply, planning permission or the time scales that are required to develop new property. The capital element of the voucher would come from others in Scotland, who would provide the privileges for the few, as the Tories intend. The proposal is the kind of "simplistic tosh"—as Judith Gillespie put it—that characterises the Tories' plans.

**Mr Monteith:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**The Presiding Officer:** You have about two minutes left, minister.

**Peter Peacock:** I will take a brief intervention.

**Mr Monteith:** The minister condemns vouchers, saying that they are intended only for the few. Does he also condemn the Labour members or their staff who use the parliamentary child care voucher system?

**Peter Peacock:** I expected better from Brian Monteith. I will treat his question with the contempt that it deserves.

The worst aspect of the Tory proposals is that, even if they worked for some, they would certainly not work for most people. If people could not exercise their choice for reasons of geography, transport or any other issue, what would happen? They would be left to rot, because a concept of failure and second best is at the heart of Tory policies and the Tory philosophy on education. The Tories do not care about the majority. Children would be left to rot in schools that had fewer teachers, higher class sizes and no improvement strategy and they would languish in those schools under a Government that was uncommitted to doing anything whatever to support improvement in those schools.

That is the philosophy that fundamentally divides the Tory party from the Executive parties. Whereas we will make improvements for all Scottish children, the Tories would turn their backs on the many in the interests of the few. That is why they have lost every election in Scotland over the past 25 years and it is why they will continue to lose elections in the future.

I move amendment S2M-718.3, to leave out from "acknowledges" to end and insert:

"supports the radical, demanding and relevant agenda set out in *A Partnership for a Better Scotland* including the delivery of excellent public services that put patients, pupils and victims first, ensure equality of access across urban and rural Scotland, devolve decision making to frontline staff, establish national standards on which local excellence can be built, backed by inspection, and share best practice and action to tackle and turn around poor performance."

09:58

**Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP):** There is a saying that a leopard never changes its spots, which is certainly true of the Tories this morning. Their answer to the crisis in the health service and failing standards in education is that the private sector will solve the problem.

The Tories say that the staffing crisis in the NHS, which is the root cause of so many of the service's problems, will somehow be solved if we take more staff away from the NHS to work privately, using—I presume—NHS facilities. Given

the small number of private hospitals in Scotland, that policy is nothing short of total nonsense. Every pound that the Tories gave to the private sector would mean a pound lost to the NHS to try to build capacity to treat more patients and reduce waiting times. Under the Tories' proposals, we would have a shrinking, second-class NHS, which dealt only with life-threatening situations, and a burgeoning private sector for those who could afford to pay.

On education, the Tories want parents to be able to send their children to the school of their choice, but they do not explain what happens when that school is full. Must schools then cram children into overcrowded classrooms? Will unpopular schools simply close as the market dictates? Will parents have to build schools if they want their children to attend a local school?

**David McLetchie:** Does the member acknowledge that, throughout Scotland, many popular schools are being closed by Labour councils, with the approval of the Executive? Does she agree that if parents had more power to choose their children's school, popular schools, such as Earnock High School, in Hamilton, would still be open and would not be being axed by Labour councils and the Labour Executive?

**Shona Robison:** Mr McLetchie will not find me defending Labour councils in Scotland; however, neither will I accept the Tory policy that the survival of the fittest is the way forward and to hell with the rest.

This debate has more to do with the new regime under Michael Howard being determined to pull the Scottish Tories into line and have Tories speak with one right-wing voice across the UK. Michael Howard may, finally, have apologised for the poll tax but, as he was a minister in the Tory Governments of the 1980s and 1990s, he has a lot more to be sorry for. The people of Scotland will not forget the damage that the Tories did to our public services when they were in power. This debate shows their desire to privatise our public services and will act as a timely reminder to the Scottish public.

The real challenge in the debate is for the Labour-Lib Dem Executive. It is those parties' failure to provide adequate stewardship that has led to many of the problems that our public services face. They have happily continued with the Tory policy of PPP/PFI with great gusto, making Scotland the PFI capital of Europe—a legacy that will mortgage our nation's future for a generation. The £8 million overspend in Lothian because of the PFI at the Edinburgh royal infirmary is just one example of the major impact on patient care and the morale of staff. Hardly a day goes by without there being yet another problem at the Executive's flagship hospital.

Of course, with PFI, the risk is meant to be taken over by the private sector: that is what the private contractors are being paid their excess profits for. However, the Executive should try telling that to the pupils of the East Lothian schools that are asking the Scottish Qualifications Authority for special dispensation from the continuous assessment part of their courses because of the disruption caused over the past few months by the halt in works because Ballast plc, the PPP project contractor, has gone into administration.

**Robert Brown:** Will Shona Robison tell us what the position would have been if the contract had been given to the public sector and the construction contractor that was building it had gone into liquidation? Would the position have been in the slightest degree different?

**Shona Robison:** Of course it would, because profits would not have been put before pupils. Pupils must come before profits—that is what people will get under the SNP rather than the Labour-Lib Dem Executive. Firms are laying off staff and are demanding the return of desks in payment for unpaid bills. Can Robert Brown imagine that happening in the public sector? I do not think so.

The price and the risk of PPP have been laid out for all to see in East Lothian, and there is still no sign of a solution. When the minister is asked, he cannot tell us who owns the six secondary schools in East Lothian. So much for the private sector earning its excess profits by taking the risk; it is clear that it is parents and pupils who are taking the risk. The laissez-faire attitude of the Executive is staggering.

That is especially evident in health issues, on which the Minister for Health and Community Care appears to have no strategy. A piecemeal approach is being taken, with individual health boards centralising their services, which is leading to an increasingly fragmented health service. Health boards are saying that they cannot cope with the pressures that are being placed on them. The impact of the working time directive on junior doctors' hours is causing huge difficulties. Health boards are saying that they have no money to implement the changes, although the Executive has known about the impact of the working time directive for years. Somehow, little or no preparation has been undertaken to cope with the pressures.

**Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** Six minutes into Shona Robison's speech, we have had criticism of Labour Party policy and criticism of Tory party policy—flawed though it is, at least it is a policy. When are we going to hear about the SNP policy?

**Shona Robison:** I will come on to a quote from Duncan McNeil himself, if he just holds his horses.

In Glasgow, we are being warned by hospital managers—in something akin to a softening-up process—that the number of hospitals in the city needs to be halved within three years to cope with drastic cuts in doctors' working hours. We are told that as many as 24 hospitals throughout Scotland face cuts as managers struggle to cope with the new laws as well as staff shortages and budget cuts. It is simply not good enough for the Minister for Health and Community Care to tell patients that bricks and mortar do not matter; they do matter when the lack of them means that patients have to travel huge distances to access a dwindling number of services.

Duncan McNeil hit the nail on the head when he said:

"It is crisis management right across Scotland".

I ask Duncan McNeil who is creating that crisis. The Minister for Health and Community Care is creating that crisis by his failure to intervene. It is time that the minister intervened.

**Mr McNeil:** Will Shona Robison take an intervention?

**Shona Robison:** No, thank you.

Instead of allowing the butchering of our health service by a thousand local cuts, we need to have a moratorium on the acute services reviews that are taking place throughout Scotland in order to have a national debate on the future direction of our health service. That process cannot be allowed to take place through a muddle of local health board initiatives with no reference to each other. We need a national strategic plan for our health service to build the capacity in the NHS. I urge the Executive to begin that process today by telling us that there will be a moratorium and that it will work towards a national strategy, which we do not have at the moment.

I move amendment S2M-718.1, to leave out from "acknowledges" to end and insert:

"rejects the proposals by the Conservative Party to privatise our public services and deplores the continued use of PPP/PFI to fund our public services by the current Labour/Liberal Democrat Scottish Executive; believes that the developing crisis in the NHS will only be addressed by increasing the capacity of the NHS to treat more patients and reduce waiting times through effective policies to recruit and retain staff within the NHS in Scotland, and calls for a national debate on the way forward for the health service in Scotland."

10:06

**Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP):** I am pleased that the Tories have brought this necessary debate to the Parliament. However, I will not take any lectures on poverty and inequality from the party of Thatcher, Thatcher the milk snatcher. The Tory party's sudden alleged caring

for the poor, which started with Michael Portillo's television appearance, makes me sick. We must value the public sector workers who work in our public services. Do we value them?

**Rhona Brankin:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. If a member is a member of a public sector union, should they not declare that as an interest at the start of their speech?

**The Presiding Officer:** It should be mentioned.

**Carolyn Leckie:** I am proud to be a member of Unison. I was going to go on to describe not only my membership, but my union activities, including my participation in 60-odd days of strike action over the past two years.

If we do not value workers, we do not value public services. Today is a day of national action on behalf of nursery nurses, who have now been on strike for more than seven months. What value do we place on them? The Auditor General for Scotland found that Scottish Enterprise paid out £108 million in consultancy fees. If consultants, who are highly paid, are worth £108 million a year, our nursery nurses are worth at least £18,000 a year, and our hospital porters, our dinner workers in schools and our cleaners are worth a minimum wage of at least £7.50 an hour. They are the working poor.

Members always start jumping up and down about how we would pay for that £7.50 an hour—which is just £13,000 a year. At this point, I mention the £80 billion in tax that was evaded by the rich last year. I also mention the £5 billion that was spent on bombing innocent Iraqis and remind members of Gordon Brown's comment that the cost would be

"as much as it takes".

We can also look closer to home. There is now an increase in spending—only in the past three years and only because Labour stuck to the Tories' original spending plans—but where is the money going? After years of dismantling, selling off and destruction—the Tories' record speaks for itself—there is a lot of damage to be repaired. We do not hear the Tories mentioning the train crashes, BT or all the other failures of privatisation. There is a lot of damage to be repaired, but the Labour Party is hell-bent on further destruction and privatisation.

Where is the money going? Pharmaceutical company profits have soared through the roof. NHS Greater Glasgow's drugs budget rose 18 per cent in one year and 14 per cent in another. The money has also gone to PFI consortia, including the construction companies whose profits are three to 10 times greater under PFIs than under traditional building contracts. It is no wonder that the money is disappearing down a black hole; it is

being siphoned off directly for the profits of private companies.

As indirect taxes go up for the majority of people and those on lower and middle incomes, as there is a constant honeymoon for the rich, and as public service spending is siphoned off for profit, hospital bed numbers are cut, staff numbers are cut and health boards and so on have to fund PFIs through their revenue budgets.

In the UK as a whole by 2007, £4.5 billion a year will have to be found just to service PFI. The experience at the ERI has shown that PFI will not guarantee even the electricity supply. It is time to end the sell-off and the rip-off—it is time to end privatisation.

I want now to concentrate on the NHS.

**Rhona Brankin:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Carolyn Leckie:** I do not have time.

Four years ago, I moved a motion at Unison's national council expressing our members' concerns about acute service and maternity service reviews. It was clear then, as it is now, that, either through incompetence or by design, there has been an utter failure to consider, assess and plan according to overall national, as well as local, needs. There has been no assessment of the impact on neighbouring health board areas of hospital closures, accident and emergency service closures and maternity service closures, which have led to greater and greater distances between services. How many A and E units, maternity units and specialist services will there be in Scotland? Where is the national strategy?

The Executive amendment, which claims to ensure equality of access, is either utter fantasy or a downright lie. The facts speak for themselves. Lanarkshire NHS Board has called a meeting to ask how to consult on a consultation that will end in February. It is trying to convince us that moving from 15 doctors overnight in each of three hospitals to five doctors overnight in each of three hospitals is an improvement. I am sorry, but 15 take away 10 equals five. There is a move to have emergency surgery on only one site. I agree that if patients can be stabilised, they can wait until the next day, but if they cannot, those most in need of emergency surgery face the further high risk of transfer in an ambulance. What those patients need is emergency surgery, not a trip in an ambulance.

Shona Robison referred to working time regulations, consultant contracts and so on—1 April is shaping up to be groundhog day. Shortages of specialists, the working time regs and the consultant contract did not fall out of the sky. Why are we approaching this crisis?

In maternity services, women from poorer backgrounds, who are most likely to need consultant care, will sometimes have to travel hundreds of miles to get it. Those at the highest risk of prematurity and low birth-weight are precisely the people who will have no local access to consultant care. In this country we have the lowest birth-weights in Britain—what are we doing about that? We see unedifying battles over the least-worst scenarios—are mums' lives worth more than our babies'? That is absolutely disgraceful. We should set our sights on what is best, not on the least-worst option.

I do not expect all members to agree with everything that the Scottish Socialist Party proposes in its amendment. However, there must be recognition that the public are fundamentally at odds with the Executive and with health boards up and down the country. If there are no paediatricians, the answer is to shut hospitals. If there were no antibiotics, would the answer be to accept that we must do without them? Of course it would not.

The public are tired of the refrain that they do not understand and that they need educated. Health boards up and down the country are saying, "If only we can educate them hard enough, they will believe that 15 take away 10 doctors is not five, but 25." Do not be ridiculous. The public understand too well that reviews mean cuts—in maternity services, accident and emergency services and intensive care. No matter how many smoke-and-mirror routines health boards and the Executive use, reviews mean cuts.

I hope that across the parties there is honesty about what is really happening. If there is not, the biggest stain on the Parliament will be not the Holyrood building, but the NHS.

I move amendment S2M-718.2, to leave out from second "the" to end and insert:

"the crucial role played by low-paid public sector workers in delivering high quality services in often stressful situations; notes however, that they are poorly rewarded for their efforts; recognises that the time has come for radical reform of public services so that they can play a fuller role in eradicating poverty and social exclusion; believes, therefore, that the Scottish Executive should reverse the privatisation of public services involved in PFI and PPP and ensure that all public services are directing their main efforts into reducing the inequalities caused by poverty and discrimination, and further believes that the Executive should introduce a £7.50 an hour minimum pay level for all public sector workers in Scotland, call a moratorium on the centralisation of hospital services which reduces access to maternity, accident and emergency and other health services for those living in our most deprived and isolated communities and instigate a full, democratic and inclusive public debate to establish the real health needs of communities and the resources and measures required to meet those needs."

10:14

**Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** I am pleased to open for the Liberal Democrats.

Ensuring that the people of Scotland have equal access to decent public services throughout the country, wherever they live, is extremely high on the political agenda of members from the coalition parties. The best thing that I can say about the Conservative motion is that at least David McLetchie acknowledges that the coalition Government in Scotland is delivering record levels of funding for our public services.

Another constructive thing that I can say about the proposals is that they are radically different from anything that is on offer today from any other party that is represented in the Parliament. As Peter Peacock pointed out, David McLetchie's explanation of his proposals is simply a reworking of discredited Tory policies on health and education. It is clear to me that the Tories have still not learned that the Scottish electorate has rejected and will continue to reject any policy that is based on creating either a two-tier health service or a two-tier schools system.

Today the Conservative party has served a constructive purpose: it has reminded us exactly why the previous Conservative Government was so unpopular. The Tories failed to invest in our health service, our education system and our transport network. They privatised the railways, pushed up unemployment and stood by as Scotland's manufacturing industry collapsed. The policies that are before us today would create a two-tier NHS, in which the better-off would be subsidised by NHS money to go private while the poor waited in line.

The poorly thought-out nature of those proposals is demonstrated by their failure to address how Scotland's remote and rural communities can access decent health care and educational facilities. It is clear that the Tories like to pose as the party of rural Scotland when they think that they can get away with that. However, the proposals show that they have not given our rural communities a second thought. That is what happens when they try to graft failed Westminster policies on to the devolved Scotland.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Does Mike Rumbles agree that the Executive has created a two-tier health service and that the poor, who cannot pay to go private, have to wait longer than ever before for health treatment? Only those who can afford private health care, who pay taxes but also have to pay the full cost of private treatment, can access treatment quickly.

**Mike Rumbles:** That is the myth that the Conservative party is generating. We are reducing

waiting times and there is no two-tier service in Scotland, although that is precisely what the Conservatives' proposals are trying to achieve.

With all the money that would go to the private sector—I note that when I intervened earlier, David McLetchie was unable to tell me how much—the best doctors and nurses would leave NHS hospitals and the best teachers would leave our state schools, all for higher salaries elsewhere. That deliberate policy of siphoning off money from our NHS to the private sector would mean, in effect, a public subsidy to the better-off.

**Mr Monteith:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mike Rumbles:** In a moment.

I will say one thing for the Conservatives—they seem to have something of a collective brass neck. The so-called patient passport is simply a passport out of the national health service. I could not think of more divisive and disastrous policies for this country if I tried.

**David McLetchie:** If the NHS provides care for terminally ill people in hospices that are run independently, is that siphoning money out of the NHS to the detriment of patients?

**Mike Rumbles:** If, in the short term, we can use public money to reduce waiting lists and to address problems, that is fine. The Conservatives are trying to do something completely different—to siphon off public money to build up the private sector. That is quite wrong.

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** Will the member give way?

**Mike Rumbles:** Not again.

It is quite instructive that these policies have been announced after the Tories south of the border adopted them. What happened to Scottish solutions for Scottish issues? There is no doubt in my mind that this new policy initiative is simply the Scottish Tories being told to implement English Tory policies.

In April last year, *The Mirror* revealed a taped conversation that took place at a meeting at the Conservative party conference, at which Liam Fox unveiled a four-phase strategy to undermine the NHS. We heard that described just now. Liam Fox said:

"The first phase is to persuade the public that the NHS isn't working".

It is.

In September the previous year, Iain Duncan Smith—does David McLetchie remember him?—said:

"In the private sector, it will cost more, so they (the patients that is) will have to top up with their own money or use some insurance scheme."

Some insurance scheme? Conservative policy now discriminates against the chronically sick, especially the elderly, who find it difficult to get health insurance. Has David McLetchie not noticed that?

There is no doubt that Tory policies in Westminster and Tory policies in Scotland are almost identical on so-called public service reform. The policies formerly applied only in England but now David McLetchie is backing them in Scotland.

The Tories' record on public services while in government was nothing short of catastrophic, although the public recollection of that record has faded somewhat in the past six years. I grant the Tories that this debate gives us an opportunity to remind the public what the Tories managed to do to our public services when they were last in charge of them. For instance, they introduced charges for eye and dental checks, which I am glad to say we are going to abolish in Scotland. Prescription charges rose from 20p when they came to power to £5.65 when they left. During the Tories' last five years, the proportion of GDP spent on schools fell. Let us not even go into their record on crime. Suffice it to say that they promised that there would be 5,000 extra police officers but cut the numbers by more than 400.

The reasons why the voters of Scotland comprehensively rejected the Conservatives in 1997, booting them out of every constituency in the country, have been resurrected this morning. It is ironic that, just as the party seems to be getting its internal act together after its desperation to get rid of Iain Duncan Smith, the Conservatives seem to have taken leave of their senses by adopting these uniquely divisive policies that are designed to subsidise the better-off at the expense of the poor. I am glad that, at last, the Tories have declared their hand in relation to how they want public services to operate in Scotland. I have every confidence that those policies will be seen as being divisive and disastrous for Scotland and I know that the Scottish people will consign them to the dustbin at the earliest opportunity.

10:22

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** It is my pleasure to contribute to this debate on the general theme of improving the provision of our public services. As David McLetchie has indicated, those services go to the heart of what the public in any civilised and responsible society is entitled to expect. Nowhere is that more relevant than in the obligation of Government to preside over a safe society in which the rule of law is both respected and enforced.

Few people, not even the Executive, would agree that we live in a safe Scotland in 2003. A

crime is committed every 1.2 minutes and there is a violent attack every 32 minutes and a drugs-related death every day. Nearly a quarter of Scots do not feel safe when walking alone in their neighbourhoods after dark.

Depressingly—and contrary to what Mr Rumbles was saying—all serious crime is up since 1999 and, with the exception of fire-raising and vandalism, it is up dramatically since 1997. The EU average of crimes per 100 people is 5.9. In Scotland, it is 8.3, which is exceeded by Denmark, where it is 9.4, and England and Wales, where it is 9.8.

As I have previously demonstrated in this chamber, all the evidence from New York and, indeed, Middlesbrough confirms that crime levels fall in the face of neighbourhood policing. Despite the best efforts of a committed and courageous Scottish police force, we do not have neighbourhood policing. The first people to confirm that would be the police officers themselves. That is why my party is calling for an expanded neighbourhood policing presence. That will be the first step towards restoring the rule of law and respect for the rule of law, reassuring the law-abiding majority that they have a role to play and deterring the potential law-breakers from their pattern of crime.

Another vital component in the delivery of law enforcement is the combination of accountability and visibility, as Mr McLetchie's motion suggests.

According to the Executive's publication "Narrowing the Gap", published in 2002, only 22.6 per cent of the total number of Scottish police officers are available for patrol or to attend incidents at a given time and, disturbingly, only 4 per cent of duty time is allocated to foot patrol. That means that only 138 police officers are on foot patrol across Scotland at any one time.

That useful report also said that more than 80 per cent of people agree that an enhanced targeted and visible police presence would make people feel safer and would reduce crime. However, that is not happening and that failure is fuelling frustration, cynicism and disillusionment.

The current governance regime for the police force is provided by the Police (Scotland) Act 1967, which provides for a tripartite sharing of legal responsibility for policing by police authorities or joint boards, chief constables and the Scottish ministers. As we know, many of those boards straddle three or more local authority areas and, to most members of the public, the members of the board and the chairman are unknown and completely anonymous. There is a vacuum between the public, who know the kind of policing that they want, and the providers of that policing. That is why my party argues that police board

conveners should be directly elected at the same time as we elect our councils.

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** Is it not the case that the Tory document "Localisation of the Police Service", which promises a fair deal for everyone on crime, proposes directly elected police authorities? How will another set of elections help to bring down crime?

**Miss Goldie:** I thank Dr Murray for her helpful intervention. That is the situation in England and Wales, where police board authorities contain people other than councillors. At least in Scotland we have an *ex facie* democratically elected structure. That is why we think that an improvement in the element of accountability could genuinely be achieved by making only the chairman the directly elected member.

**The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):** Will the member give way?

**Miss Goldie:** I hope that Cathy Jamieson will forgive me, as I want to expand the point that Dr Murray has mentioned. The two elements are visibility and, importantly, accountability. All members would regard any attempt to politicise the police as regressive and profoundly undesirable. That is where a delicate balance has to be struck.

Directly elected police board conveners would have a public mandate, particularly on boards that are made up of councillors from other local authorities, and they would have the authority to drive forward neighbourhood policing plans and would be accountable to local people. Dr Murray and the minister might be interested to know that the position is not peculiar to the Scottish Conservatives. Her Majesty's Government's consultation paper "Policing: Building Safer Communities Together", which was published on 4 November, seeks views on wholly directly elected police boards south of the border.

When we seek to empower people in relation to health and education, it is logical and desirable that we ensure that they have the same influence in relation to procuring a safe society.

10:28

**Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab):** For 15 years, I have been involved in the public sector as an elected representative, mostly at the chalkface, where I have been constantly exhorted and have exhorted others to improve quality, set higher standards and ensure safety. When I first saw today's motion, I thought, "Great! The Tories have renewed themselves. They have a new agenda. They're caring for the less fortunate in society." Having listened to their speeches this morning, however, I now see that all that we have are the

same old Tories pursuing the same old policy of improvements for the privileged few while those who are less well off are left out in the cold. The only difference is that the Tories have become better at disguising Thatcherite policies as universally beneficial.

The Tories' general approach is based on the assumption that if we compartmentalise services and consider each one in isolation, we will somehow improve people's lives. In reality, however, each service impacts on another and, in turn, they cumulatively impact on the communities that they serve. The concept of community is alien to the Tories, at least when it comes to policy making. The only ones that they seem to recognise are the business community, the professional community and the well-off who are able to choose.

**Miss Goldie:** If the Tories are indifferent to the concept of communities, why do we advocate a policy that will protect communities by allowing parents to choose to keep schools open in their communities instead of being the victims of a centralised educational approach that is denying them freedom and opportunity?

**Christine May:** I am delighted that Miss Goldie has raised that, because it demonstrates precisely my point about putting buildings before quality of service and results: buildings do not of themselves deliver good-quality services or improvements to communities, and it is sometimes necessary to reduce the number of outlets for a service to ensure that quality is raised and maintained. If we enable parents to send their children to whatever schools they like, poorer families will lose out because, whatever the choices available, they can afford only the local schools. That is why the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition is investing heavily in support for poorer areas and areas in which the need for support has been demonstrated.

Poorer parents cannot afford to drive five or 10 miles every morning like the people in the big houses up the road can, so, under the Tories' proposals, the wealthy would send their children to the best schools, which will become better off because of the increase in funding. Nobody in the Tories has demonstrated any recognition of the current funding system or suggested how it might be altered, and we now hear that they will raid the capital budgets as well as the revenue budgets. That is great. Having starved the public sector of capital investment for 20 years, the Tories will now raid the Executive's generosity in increasing those budgets for the first time in 20 years. The Executive has increased those budgets so that the poor have an opportunity to use better-quality buildings and see more police on the street working out of neighbourhood offices, as in the

community policing initiative in Fife. The chief constable has demonstrated his commitment to that initiative by increasing investment in it, which is down to the increased money from the Executive that is available to him.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** Where has Christine May been over the past 20 years or so? Even in Fife, new hospitals—which the Labour Party is now virtually intent on closing—courts and police stations were provided under the Tories.

**Christine May:** The Tories may have provided the odd building here and there, but capital budgets provide for the improvement and maintenance of those facilities and—

**Mr Monteith:** Where are the new schools?

**Christine May:** I will come to new schools in a moment, if Brian Monteith will wait.

The budgets for maintenance and improvement reduced over the years under the Tories, and I can get Phil Gallie the figures if he wants them.

I will consider hospitals for a moment. I understand that the Tories voted against foundation hospitals down south, and I am sure that, when Michael Howard went on his fishing trip with David McLetchie and Ted Brocklebank—neither of them are in the chamber, so I cannot check—in Pittenweem on Sunday, he took the opportunity to tell them that policies are now the same north and south of the border, but I do not see how that benefits the majority of the population. In the health service in Scotland, we are looking at the improvement that has come about because of the targeting of the key diseases and the consequential effect on acute services. That is difficult.

Tax cuts, particularly in council tax, reduce the amount of money that is available for police, education and primary care services, and I cannot see how that will benefit the poor. I am not saying that Executive policy is by any means perfect—I have complained in the past and will continue to complain about the multiplicity of targets, some of which conflict with one another. There is more work to be done on that, and I hope that, in his closing speech, the minister will accept that approaches such as the quality-of-life money, for which broad targets were set, and the partnership between social work services and the health service in community care for the elderly have worked extremely well. I want to see the Executive doing that kind of thing. By and large, we have huge investment—far beyond what we have had in the past 20 years—in our public services, and I want that to continue.

I support the Labour amendment.



10:34

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** When I was researching for today's debate, I tried to access the Scottish Tories' website, and up came the words, "This page cannot be displayed. Press refresh." Two thoughts occurred to me: "Is this personal or is the great Scottish public also being denied access to the tablets of Tory wisdom?" and "Is it worth pressing the refresh button?" It was probably not worth pressing refresh, and, so far, nothing said by the Tory or Labour members has changed my mind.

In 1997, Labour came into power. Before that, we had 18 years of Tory rule. That means that we have so far had 24 years of Tory and neo-Tory rule: a seamless transition from blue to the palest shade of undetectable pink. The current problems of delivery to the Scottish people are a shared unionist liability. The unionists are a coalition of the culpable.

The shortage of consultants and lack of access to all specialties—oncology, radiology, psychology and every other ology in the book—does not date from this year or last, but goes back for over a decade. It takes 12 years—

**Mr McNeil:** Will Christine Grahame give way?

**Christine Grahame:** Oh, if Duncan McNeil will let me get into my stride a little bit, I will be delighted to let him in.

Successive Westminster Governments have not recognised the status of nurses, which is key to the delivery of a caring and fair health service, where it matters: in the pay cheque. Let us not talk about percentage pay rises, because a 5 per cent pay rise for a fat cat is a damn sight more than a 5 per cent pay rise for a nurse. Forty per cent of our medical graduates leave and they do not come back to Scotland.

David McLetchie referred to purchasing power, which is, of course, privatisation. A two-tier service will disintegrate the national health service even more. We have fragmentation of professions and allied professionals. Contracting out of cleaning and catering has not improved delivery: we have dirtier hospitals and 40 per cent of our elderly people leaving hospitals are found to have a degree of malnutrition.

**Mr McNeil:** Given that Christine Grahame is convener of the Health Committee and given that the SNP health spokesperson made the same statement earlier, does she agree that one of the big problems leading to the shortage of consultants and doctors, which has a tremendous impact on the services that we can deliver, has been brought about by the European working time directive and the reduction of junior doctors' hours, which all parties supported?

**Christine Grahame:** No, I do not agree. It takes 12 years to train a consultant—they do not grow on trees—so we were already losing professionals way back in the time when we had the Tories and before Labour, as the neo-Tories, came into power and picked up half the Tories' blooming policies.

Hospitals that are built by PPP/PFI fail—the Edinburgh royal infirmary is a classic case—but Tories and neo-Tories hurtle us down the PPP/PFI brae without brakes.

**Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con):** Does Christine Grahame not agree that the problems with the Edinburgh royal infirmary are due to the bad way in which the contract was drawn up and the lack of specification? The contractors are only supplying what was asked for in the contract, and I think that the minister would agree on that point.

**Christine Grahame:** That is right, because it is cheap build and the contractors make their money on running the contract thereafter—we have been down that road with the private prisons. The money is in having the contract for 25 or 30 years down the line. Later on, the public sector owns the building when it is in a state of decay—if it is not already in such a state when it opens.

The NHS bill implodes, morale in the NHS declines and Labour continues with its neo-Tory solutions, which are all in-your-face and behind-your-back privatisation. The hypocrisy of Labour members lambasting Tory policies—when they grub around picking them up, dusting them down and relabelling them—is sweet. PFI becomes PPP, and foundation hospitals, which are Tony's totem, are also a Tory idea. Privatisation, like a rose by any other name, is privatisation.

**Christine May:** Will Christine Grahame give way?

**Christine Grahame:** No. I ask Christine May to let me get on.

However, those policies are not a bitter pill for the unreconstructed neo-Tories who, appropriately, sit to my right.

I turn from the disciples to the prophets. The Tory solution is to throw more money at the private sector, which will, as it does now, use public facilities. The two-tier Tories promise passports for the privileged, the articulate and the determined—the very people who should stay to defend and use the failing health service and improve it for the less articulate and determined.

Jack the lad's solution is two bills, as if legislation alone will deliver nurses, consultants, general practitioners and dentists. What happened to dentists in Mike Rumbles's speech? He forgot about them. They are either not there, not in training or ready to retire.

Scotland—a self-sufficient land rich in food and fuel with a reducing population—is the sick man of Europe. Independence from the union cannot come soon enough for Scotland's pregnant women, elderly people and ill people so that its rich resources can be diverted from war, weapons and dripping roasts for the capitalist fat cats. Nye Bevan is turning in his grave—we should let him rest in peace.

10:40

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** I want to add a degree of seriousness to the debate. There is a debate to be had on how we develop and deliver policy for our public services and on whether the balance between the national and local levels is right. Are local authorities, health boards, education authorities and local policy makers responsive to local priorities or are they service deliverers on behalf of the Scottish Executive and the Parliament? We need continually to consider that balance. We must also bring in strategic regional planning, which has been debated this morning, without losing local character from schools and hospitals. I hope that the debate will address those challenges.

Most important, we must consider how we gear the scrutinising of policy in the Parliament and its committees so that we see better qualitative outcomes for people, such as better-educated children and healthier Scots, rather than quantitative outputs. The Finance Committee is beginning to examine that issue. It has only now come to light, through my questioning of the Minister for Finance and Public Services, that a delivery unit and a strategy unit exist, which are answerable to the permanent secretary in the Scottish Executive and which work on the issue. However, there is little public scrutiny of that work. The performance assessment framework in the health service has more than 100 quantitative output indicators. What public accountability is there in that?

I hope that next week's budget debate will address some of those issues but, to turn to the motion, the Conservative approach does not offer anything to that debate. In fact, the motion is based on deceit. The Conservatives offer passports for parents that they say would allow much greater choice in where people receive services, but that will be realistic only if there is sufficient capacity in the health and education services to offer that choice to everybody in Scotland. Such capacity can be brought about only by investment in the services, staff and buildings of a national health service.

The Conservatives sometimes mention investment. For example, their manifesto for the

elections in May said that they would stick to the Executive's spending plans. When they are on a public platform, they deny that they wish to cut services, but the enterprise spokesman, Murdo Fraser, who is not in the chamber, talks about the Conservative party being a tax-cutting party and supports Iain Duncan Smith's proposal of a 20 per cent all-round cut in public services. It is almost hypocritical to say that we can cut taxes without cutting services.

**Mr Monteith:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jeremy Purvis:** Not at the moment.

The passport for health would be only for elective procedures. The removal of people who use elective procedures, and therefore of the accompanying funding that boards receive, would bring into question the idea of a national health service and, at the same time, raise serious questions about the long-term future of consultant-led services, which are in doubt throughout Scotland. There are question marks over the consultant-led maternity services in the Borders general hospital in Melrose in my constituency. A passport system that raised difficulties for fragile local rural hospitals would raise long-term questions. In one fell swoop, the Conservatives would end the NHS and put local services at risk—not bad for a morning's work.

**Mr Monteith:** The member suggests that Murdo Fraser supports 20 per cent tax cuts. Can he produce—perhaps not today, but at any point—evidence that Iain Duncan Smith, Michael Howard or Murdo Fraser have said that they would make such cuts? The member says that tax cuts would have to be paid for by cuts in public services. Does he understand, or has he ever read about, the Laffer curve and the idea that cutting taxes can increase revenue, which many Governments have put into practice?

**Jeremy Purvis:** The Scottish and British people are reasonably sensible and they understand that we cannot get something for nothing, but every time the Conservatives are on a political platform in an election, that is what they offer the people of Scotland.

We must put into perspective some of the negativism that we have heard, particularly from the Tories and the SNP. Mr McLetchie said that choice is available only for those who can afford it, which is code for saying that quality is available only for those who can afford it. However, there are examples of truly outstanding work in comprehensive schools in the state system. The report of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education's inspection in April of Beeslack Community High School in Penicuik, which is in my constituency, states:

"The leadership provided by the headteacher and senior promoted staff was of very high quality and all staff worked together very effectively. The school was characterised by a strong, inclusive ethos and a very high degree of consistent, high quality practice across the whole range of its work."

I was honoured to be a guest at Beeslack's Christmas concert last night. Two pupils will be royal academicians.

We can have best-quality education and health services in the state sector, but we cannot tolerate the Conservatives' approach, which would reduce and almost end the national health service and our comprehensive education system.

10:46

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** At the outset of Jeremy Purvis's speech, he asked for balance and for the appropriate and fair allocation of resources throughout Scotland. We will have to watch the situation with vigilance in the years to come.

I am glad to speak in this brief debate, but before I set out my party's policy of reform of education, I will refer to the current state of affairs. The Scottish Executive has committed to increase spending on education and has kept that promise. Since Labour came to power in 1997, spending per secondary pupil is up by almost £1,000 a year and spending per primary pupil is up by £785 a year. I warmly welcome that increase of funding for the education system, but I must ask what Labour has achieved. If we compare 1999—when the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition began—with 2003, we find that violence against school staff, permanent exclusions, temporary exclusions and truancy have gone up. On attainment, recently released figures show that Labour has failed to deliver its 1999 manifesto pledge that 80 per cent of children would reach the appropriate standard in reading, writing and arithmetic by the time that they leave primary school. Too many children are failing and being failed. For example, according to the Executive's figures, a majority of secondary pupils in Edinburgh and Glasgow cannot read or write properly.

I know only too well that the Executive genuinely wants to improve educational standards, but there is a basic problem with the system. That is why the Scottish Conservatives advocate radical reform, which is the only way in which to improve our education system.

**Mike Rumbles** *rose*—

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** I am in the middle of making a point.

We will establish the better schools passport, which will extend choice to all parents by allowing them to use the money that is spent on their

children's education to access a wider and better range of schools.

**Mike Rumbles:** Will the member give way on that point?

**Dr Murray** *rose*—

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Let me continue. I will give way to Elaine Murray in a moment.

Through the better schools passport, we will end the constraints on parents and provide an incentive for all schools to achieve the highest standards. By extending access to schools in the area as well as to current independent and state schools, the better schools passport will provide a level of quality and diversity that is at present available only to a few. The policy will also allow good schools to expand by scrapping the present rule that prevents new capacity being created while any spare capacity remains.

**Dr Murray:** Lord James Douglas-Hamilton may be aware that Dumfries and Galloway Council recently conducted a two-year consultation exercise on the issue in rural and urban areas. Parents and communities overwhelmingly wanted to retain the local comprehensive schools in their communities; they did not want to send their children to new schools, however well equipped they are. How does that equate with the Tories' suggestions?

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Our policy is to support popular schools. If there is insufficient capacity in popular schools, it should be created.

The idea of the policy is to create opportunity for all by improving standards. If a school is failing, parents will put pressure on it to improve; if it does not, they will take their children to an alternative school.

Education authorities at local level will have a key role in intervening early in schools to find out whether management change is necessary, which will avoid the spectre of school buildings not being used. The fact is that popular schools can be kept open. The Executive is rubber-stamping the closure of Earnock High School in Hamilton. That is the kind of school that would be kept open under our policy.

I recommend to the Labour members who are present the wise words of Prime Minister Tony Blair. At the Labour Party conference, he said:

"In education, we need to move to the post-comprehensive era".

He went on to say that both education and the NHS

"require an end to the 'one size fits all' mass production public service ... Why shouldn't there be a range of schools for parents to choose from: from specialist schools to the

new City Academies, to faith schools, to sixth forms and sixth form colleges offering excellent routes into university and skilled employment? Why shouldn't good schools expand or take over failing schools or form federations?"

I can well understand why Mr Mike Rumbles and members of his party might wish to dissociate themselves from Mr Tony Blair, but Mr Peacock is a supporter of the Labour Party. If Tony Blair is only too willing to espouse Conservative policy, why does the Executive not do so—if not now, perhaps in a few months' time? Surely the Labour members of the Executive will support their own Prime Minister.

**Mike Rumbles:** Will the member give way?

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** No, I will not, because my time is almost used up.

The options in front of us are simple. We can settle for carrying on as we are doing, which would mean having huge inequalities in attainment throughout Scotland; settling for the fact that thousands of pupils leave school with no qualifications; denying most parents any real choice; and settling for the status quo. There is another option—we can give parents genuine choice in how best to educate their children in rural areas and throughout Scotland. [*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):** Order.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The future of thousands of children in Scotland is at stake. We seek to replace uniformity with innovation and diversity. In reflecting the wishes of parents, we will produce higher standards and greater opportunity for all. We will do that by offering parents the better schools passport.

10:52

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** Members are not fooled by the Tories' new enlightened approach to debating. The Tories agree that public services have never been better funded, but flattery gets you nowhere. The Tories stop short of commending a Labour Government for its record levels of investment in our public services, but at least they are taking part in a debate, unlike the nats, whose silence shows that they are a bit policy light this morning.

It appears that the Tories' failure to commend us is not even due to a lack of political will; it is just that we do not embrace the private sector in the same way that they do, which is fair enough. The party that might be the party of low taxation—it is not sure about that—is implying that it can match Labour's record of investment and commitment to public services with less money. Jeremy Purvis was correct to point out that that cannot be done and that the public are not fooled.

The Tories' position is that improvement is to be achieved by the creation of choice and the decentralisation of structures such as those in the NHS. I believe that the passports that they talk about are a gimmick, which I predict they will drop before the next general election.

Let us examine that prospect of choice. The Tories talk about people having choice in where to have an operation or what school to send their children to, but the choice that they are really asking for is a choice between private and public services. It is clear that they want to give more prominence to the private sector. I do not think that they can help themselves, because they are much more comfortable with the private sector.

Let us consider an example. The standard cost of a hip replacement under BUPA is £8,000, whereas the cost in the NHS is £4,500. Even with a Tory voucher worth 60 per cent of that, there will still be a bill of £5,300 to pay. Perhaps the Tories' definition of choice is not the same as ours, because that scenario does not offer a real choice to those who do not have £5,000 to spend. One could say that the Tories are adopting a social exclusion policy. They have always been opposed to centralisation of our NHS and that is the position in which they are most comfortable.

**Mr Monteith:** I am impressed with the member's arithmetic, but has she ever heard of insurance—in particular, health insurance? In her calculation, should she not take account of the fact that someone might pay for their hip replacement through health insurance, which would mean that 60 per cent of the cost would be met by the NHS?

**Pauline McNeill:** Mr Monteith should do some arithmetic of his own, because insurance policies cost money—people do not get them for nothing. It is interesting that the Tories have enlightened us on their position—they have told us that they intend to offer choice by adopting the American system.

The Tories claim that the number of deaths from stroke can be reduced by having more decentralisation, but they do not say how that can be done.

There is no doubt that the drive to reduce junior doctors' hours in line with the working time directive, to which Duncan McNeil referred, is action that the Tories should have taken when they were in power; they have left a Labour Government to implement the directive at the latest possible point.

In the 1990s, we had a policy of decentralisation, which was called the internal market. It set hospital against hospital and nurse against nurse. The elements of the health service failed to collaborate with each other. The policy was an unmitigated disaster, about which the

Tories should express regret. They do not understand that, no matter how interesting their new policy is, they will not be able to shake off their past.

**Shona Robison:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Pauline McNeill:** No, I will not.

The Tories are not, and should not be, trusted on the NHS. Under the Tories, the connection between ill health and poverty was not recognised. As any health service manager can confirm, that was the phrase that dare not be mentioned.

The Tories have never understood what the Labour Government is trying to achieve with its social inclusion policies and its determination to eradicate poverty. For communities that have lived with the scourge of unemployment and constant low investment, the presentation of a choice between public and private services is meaningless; what they want is jobs, skills and real choice.

The role of the state in supporting the poorest in our communities is fundamental. There is a choice to be made, but it is about whether to properly fund public services with regular and constant investment and to provide equality of access or to provide a poorly funded mixture of public and private services. In my view, there is only one choice to make.

We need to have a mature debate on how to ensure that we constantly improve the quality of our public services. Labour members are not complacent about that. I, too, am concerned about the centralisation of our health service and I have arguments with my local health board about what it is doing. However, it is not just the politicians who should be involved in that debate—everyone should be involved, including the health service professionals who are pushing for choice.

I want to make a point about workers in the public sector. I have spent my adult life fighting for the rights of low-paid workers, particularly those in the national health service. I am pleased that a Labour-Liberal coalition is addressing that through “Agenda for Change”. I know that some of those issues still need to be resolved, but for the first time we are promising a minimum wage and proper conditions of service. Without staff who feel that they are properly protected and looked after, we will not have a proper health service. We need to go further: we should give GPs commissioning powers to speed up the process of diagnosis, we should have more one-stop clinics in the NHS and everyone in the country should have a right to register with a dentist and to receive treatment.

I think that the Executive’s crime agenda is the most revolutionary of any Government’s to date.

We are determined to say that it is unacceptable to have antisocial behaviour in our communities. Our work on that, for which we have cross-party support, is one of the most important things that the Parliament is doing and the reform of our court system is fundamental to the development of our public services.

10:58

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** I was glad to find that this morning’s debate was a Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party debate on the reform of public services. The reason why I was so glad was that, when I read the motion—particularly when I reached the part that mentions foundation hospitals—I could easily have thought that it had been lodged by the Executive.

It is a bit rich—I use that word advisedly—for the Tories to lecture anyone on public services and even on public spending, given their appalling record not only on health, as Malcolm Chisholm has pointed out, but on education and, most important, local government, which was nearly destroyed by the last Tory Government. There are many people with long memories—and some with short memories—who are glad that the Tories are out of power.

When we remember what the Tories did when they were in government, we realise that they are once again showing their true colours in what they are proposing today. Mention has been made of foundation hospitals, although more by Tory members than by Labour members. Foundation hospitals are supposed to be the NHS and the independent sector working in partnership, but they are actually nothing more and nothing less than privatisation by the back door.

Let us also have a wee look at what would happen if the so-called patient’s passport came to fruition. Pauline McNeill touched on that issue, but she would do well to think about the matter. Given that foundation hospitals, as pushed through by the Labour Government in Westminster, could come to fruition here in Scotland, perhaps Labour members could learn some lessons during today’s debate. For example, let us look at the current prices for private operations. It costs £9,000 for a heart bypass, £5,000 for a hip replacement and £3,000 for a hysterectomy. Those are much more expensive than NHS prices.

“Choice, choice, choice” was the constant mantra during David McLetchie’s speech, but let me tell him what choice would mean under his foundation hospitals or patient’s passport scheme, or whatever label he wants to use. Basically, it would mean extending choice for only 5 per cent of Scotland’s population—those would be the only people who could afford it. The other 95 per cent

of Scotland's population could not afford it. That is what David McLetchie's foundation hospitals would mean.

**Mr Monteith:** I will try to impersonate David McLetchie just for a minute. Does the member accept that, although she argues that only 5 per cent would use the patient's passport to access private care, the other 95 per cent would be able to use it to access care throughout the NHS in the whole of Scotland rather than just in their health board area?

**Ms White:** There would be 95 per cent who could not afford such care. What about the doctors who would perform the operations? Would they move over to the private sector? The Tories would do well to learn that lesson.

As Shona Robison highlighted in great detail, PFI/PPP and the privatisation and sell-off of our railways were imposed on the Scottish people and on the British people via Westminster when the Tories were in power. The Tories also seem to have forgotten about the fuel tax escalator, which caused all sorts of problems, particularly in the Highlands. All those policies were introduced by the Tories with absolutely disastrous consequences for Scotland. That is the legacy that the Tories have left behind for the people of Scotland.

Talking of legacies, I want to turn to the other unionist party. The Labour Party has taken on the Tory legacy and developed it with even more vigour. We have had more PFI/PPP and tuition fees. Thousands of council houses have been sold off and have been privatised by being transferred to the private sector.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Ms White:** I am sorry, but I have only a couple of minutes.

Labour members may crow about the extra money that was announced yesterday by their so-called masters in Westminster, but the public will ask what the Executive is doing with that money. Christine Grahame and others have highlighted the fact that the education system is failing our children, that our health service is crumbling and that homelessness is increasing. One in three children in Scotland lives in poverty. That is the legacy that Labour has delivered. Labour is supposed to be socialist, for goodness' sake.

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** "Socialism" is the word that Labour never mentions.

**Ms White:** That is right. Wendy Alexander mentioned it once and I told her that it was her mantra. Bill Butler said that the Labour Party is not socialist, but I think that he needs to be taken back

to the drawing board to learn.

As the Minister for Health and Community Care will sum up today's debate, I want to touch on the health service. Both Shona Robison and Carolyn Leckie mentioned the crisis in the health service, especially with the maternity services review. I ask the minister to think seriously about having a national debate on that subject. Not only in my area but the throughout the country, people are complaining about the flaws in the consultation process and the lack of consultation. I ask the minister to consider that seriously when he sums up.

A lot of people might say that the health service costs a lot of money, but let me just give the minister a wee fact. Gordon Brown announced yesterday an extra £800 million for the on-going war in Iraq and Afghanistan—in total, £6.3 billion has been spent on an illegal war. That should help to put in context the situation that we have in the health service today.

11:04

**Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green):** The motion suggests that choice and accountability are the two key ways of empowering people who use public services. No one doubts that the system of public services in Scotland needs radical reform. The welfare state of the 1940s cannot be expected to meet all the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Public services in this country have been plagued by underfunding and inflexible state models of provision. People feel that their public services are failing, but the response by the centre has been an increasing centralisation of control. We have had endless targets and reams of strategies to the extent that, in education, it is difficult for good teachers to use their skills to determine the lesson plans and to set priorities for their pupils based on what their pupils need. Such concentration on central targets and central direction is not the solution.

I believe in mutual provision of services rather than provision of services through the market. Although many people agree that public ownership is the means by which public services should be provided, there is a big difference between that and state control with central direction of service provision.

The Tory solution concentrates on choice, but most of the time there is no choice in public services. People do not have a choice about which accident and emergency unit they attend—they want to go to their local one as quickly as possible. People want to send their kids to a local primary school. They want to go swimming at their local leisure centre. They want to go to the local library rather than travel halfway across town to go to the

library for which they might have a passport. People want local services. Most of the time, there is no choice about services. People want to use the local one.

**Mr Davidson:** The member makes a good argument about why there should be choice, but what kind of choice would his party offer? At the moment, people are directed to services even if the local service is bad. There might be a good service a mile down the road, but if it happens to be over a county or health board boundary, people cannot go there. However, the Minister for Health and Community Care—who is not present at the moment—has said that he wants health boards to co-operate so that patients can move across boundaries. Will Mark Ballard join us in forcing the minister to go further?

**Mark Ballard:** The key is not to create an artificial choice but to decide who has power over the direction of services. The key is democracy and decentralisation rather than the creation of artificial choices between different library provisions over different county boundaries. The solution is not the Tory insistence that the market must always provide the best way. Real reform is about democracy and decentralisation, together with proper funding. That, rather than patient and pupil passports, is what we need.

**Jeremy Purvis:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mark Ballard:** Sorry, I must move on.

To achieve that and to give people a real stake in the services that they own, we need a wider vision of public ownership and control. We need to explore new forms of mutual ownership. We need a revival of the mutual idea and a revival of co-operatives. The provision of public services can be expanded and enhanced not through greater state control, but through more co-operative options and new forms of social enterprise with innovative structures.

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** Does the member accept the principle of mutual ownership for Scottish Water?

**Mark Ballard:** The key is to have local control. We do not want big structures that are unresponsive to community needs. We need more local democracy and decentralisation. That cannot be achieved in any policy area by having a single body that covers the whole of Scotland with a board of stakeholders who are supposed to represent all the communities of Scotland. The question is most of all about scale.

The key for public services is to move away from a philosophy of consultation. Consultation is good in that it helps service providers to understand their users' needs, but we need to move away

from that model to the model of participation. We need a genuine shift in power, control and ownership of public services. Ours is a very different agenda from Labour's agenda of foundation hospitals and public-private partnerships, which are about introducing market mechanisms and market forms of management.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Mark Ballard:** Sorry, I have only a minute and a bit left.

Instead of that, we need a system of public ownership that really brings in the public. We need a new culture of empowered citizenship to support and build capacity in communities to allow them to play their full part in running public services. We need to support groups such as the Scottish Civic Forum in developing strategies to empower people. That is a long-term programme, which represents a sea change in the political culture of Scotland and a move away from state control towards citizen control and citizen power.

A new culture of participation in the public services is required. That will entail a big cultural change in the way in which public sector organisations work. We cannot simply bolt the slower and more organic ways in which communities work on to existing public services, which are designed not for communities to interact with, but for civil servants to run. There has to be a complete change in those organisations' relationships with the public.

We need support for and recognition of new mutualism and social enterprises to provide some of the structures. Most of all, we need a commitment to decentralise and democratise the provision of public services. That is a process, not a simple event, and the transition must be handled carefully. That strategy, rather than the Tories' efforts simply to shift public provision to the market, will lead to real reform of public services.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** A number of members still wish to speak, so after Ken Macintosh has spoken I shall drop the time limit for speeches to three minutes, or perhaps two, to try to get everyone in.

11:11

**Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** A man walks into the doctor's with a duck on his head. That is an old line and a familiar way to start a joke. One describes an inherently implausible situation and creates a sense of dramatic tension, so that people are waiting for the punch line. That is how I feel when I hear the Tories talking about public services—I am waiting for the punch line. I do not believe that they are serious, so I wait for a joke.

I am not sure whether anyone can take the Tories seriously on public services reform. They had 18 years in power and their record shows that their approach to public services was not to reform them, but to sell them out, sell them short and sell them off. Their whole approach was driven by the dogma of market forces. If something could not be privatised, it had to be marketised. The application of market forces was the only way in which public services could be brought to heel.

I see little in the motion to persuade me that the Tories have moved on. The new buzzwords may be "patient passports" or "pupil passports", but the solution that the Tories are relying on is purchasing power and the belief that everything can be bought and sold. Their way of ensuring choice and efficiency is to harness that most powerful of motivations, greed. The result, of course, would be to turn patient against patient, school against school and rich against poor.

**Mr Davidson:** A couple of minutes ago, Pauline McNeill said that it was right that GPs should commission care. GPs are in the private sector and they are the basis of primary care as we know it—that is a case of buying in care. Does the member agree that Governments should set standards to purchase that care, whether from the public sector, the independent sector or profit-making and non-profit-making trusts? Can he expand his mind to answer that?

**Mr Macintosh:** I agree that the Government should set standards, but I disagree with the idea that doctors, for example, are motivated only by their purchasing power or that purchasing power is the only way in which to make reform of the NHS work for the good of patients. I find it hard to believe that after all this time the Tories have failed to grasp that what really distinguishes the public sector is its values. The public sector ethos—or whatever one wants to call it—is what motivates public sector workers, which means that the profit motive will never be enough by itself to initiate reform.

I suppose that we should be grateful that the Tories have at least finally recognised the need for public services reform. Members have warmly welcomed their choice of subject for today's

debate. After all, there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repenteth—and, goodness knows, we know the Tories' sins well enough. However, for six years the Labour Party has been trying to introduce the power of consumer or personal choice; we have been trying to harness choice to the values of the public sector, not to discard one for the other.

If we are to be truly successful in reforming public services, we need to persuade people that our schools, our local government and our national health service are run in their interest—not just in their interest as members of society, but in their self-interest as individuals. An NHS that cannot deliver the operations that we need when we need them will not maintain the public's support, confidence and good will indefinitely, which is why the reform of public services is essential. Services such as the NHS are good for everyone, but they are particularly beneficial for the poor, the disadvantaged and the vulnerable, as they help to reduce inequality in our society and are a force for redistribution.

Mr McLetchie magnanimously acknowledged the increased spending that the Government and Executive have chosen to invest in the public services, as if the Tories agreed with any of those spending choices or as if they would not reverse them given half a chance. Even a cursory examination of the health passport scheme shows that the Tories' proposals would take billions of pounds out of our NHS to pay for those who can already afford private care. That is on top of the supposed tax cuts to which Jeremy Purvis and Pauline McNeill referred. All that adds up to a credibility gap and little that I have heard this morning has persuaded me that the Tories are bridging it.

The Tory motion states that none of that investment has made a difference in improving standards. It is right that investment by itself is not enough, but that investment, allied to reform, has made a difference—it is just blind prejudice to say otherwise. In my constituency, as around the whole of Scotland, we have more teachers, more classroom assistants, brand-new schools and a huge expansion in nursery provision, with places for all three and four-year-olds.

Parents and pupils can see the difference with their own eyes. Later this morning—I do not think that they are here yet—pupils are visiting from Mearns Castle High School and Crookfur Primary School, which are perfect examples of the achievements that pupils and comprehensive schools can make in our areas. When Labour came to power in 1997, around 10 per cent of young people in East Renfrewshire chose to go to private school. That figure is now down to 3 per cent. Families are choosing to opt into, not out of,



well-run, comprehensive public services. That is not just because we are improving the fabric of our schools; it is because we are making the schools more accessible and more accountable to the families who use them.

That is what we have to do with our hospitals. We must continue with our huge programme of investment, but we have to make hospitals more responsive to the people who use them. We can do so through local systems of control and accountability. We will not do so with a policy based on the assumption that the people who choose to work in the public sector are solely self-interested and self-serving and need to be kept in check through the use of the profit motive.

The interests of providers and service users are not always the same, but neither are they in opposition. We share a common belief in making the public sector work for the benefit of all. We need investment, we need choice, we need to take the public services with us and we need to maintain a public sector ethos that will continue to serve us well. I urge members to reject the joke that is the Conservative motion.

11:17

**John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP):** I declare an interest. I am probably the only person in this place who has paid into the NHS since its inception in 1948. I am proud of the NHS and all that it has achieved. I am also saddened and sickened by the bitter cross-party fighting that I have witnessed this morning. Members should all think black burning shame of themselves. Instead of bickering viciously, we in this place should be seeking a 100 per cent cross-party consensus with the single aim of making the Scottish national health service a fine model for the whole of Europe. There should be a target of zero waiting time for all life-threatening illness and for all intolerable pain-related problems, such as those requiring hip replacements, which have been blandly mentioned.

I back our national health service 100 per cent. However, in 2002, when I was told that I required bilateral hip replacement and that I would have to wait a full year for it, I am sorry, but I took the easy option and opted out. I did so gladly, because pain is something that has to be experienced and tolerated to be believed. What worries me and makes me feel guilty is the fact that there are thousands of people who cannot do what I did and opt out and buy relief from intolerable pain.

**Mr Davidson:** Will the member give way?

**John Swinburne:** Give me a second, please.

I had the operation at my own cost, without any insurance. That motivated me more than probably anything else to come into the political arena to

see whether I could do anything to help senior citizens who suffer the unbearable pain of arthritis or who need health-giving treatment but cannot afford to adopt the approach that I took. The fact that I had been able to pay for that relief really bothered my conscience. It is unfair that some people cannot have such relief. I say honestly and sincerely that I felt and continue to feel guilty. If I can do anything to help any party to accelerate progress, my efforts will not have been in vain.

The pathetic mud slinging in the Parliament today is unacceptable to the Scottish electorate, who look to this place to produce some answers to the problems that face us. For example, ME costs the country millions of pounds every year, yet we do not contribute towards finding the cause of that problem. That is another little matter to which this place must attend.

11:21

**Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** I have been rereading Peter Ustinov's biography, "Dear Me", in which he writes that one of the greatest temptations that Alexander Solzhenitsyn faced when he was exiled to the west was the thought that he would be listened to. I will save the Tories from temptation, as listening to them is not on my agenda.

**Carolyn Leckie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Stewart Stevenson:** No, because I have only three minutes for my speech.

Disintermediation is the Tory policy. As the Tories say, that means developing the private sector to bring more interests to bear on the public sector, such as shareholders, proprietors and other people who have to be paid off and whose interests must be taken account of in providing public services. That is hardly in the interests of the people who receive services.

**Mr Davidson** *rose*—

**Stewart Stevenson:** As I have three minutes, there is no chance of interventions.

The Tories have hard questions to face as they sum up the debate, which I might encapsulate in the Colonsay-or-Corstorphine argument. If we are to have passports for teaching and health services, will the cost of providing a pupil place on Colonsay be the same as that in Corstorphine? It certainly will not be. Will the ambulance that goes to Colonsay, which is likely to be a helicopter, have the same funding as the ambulance that takes someone from Corstorphine? The Tories have fundamentally failed to link choice and value—two words that they use in their motion. Providing choice is fair enough, but it does not lead ineluctably to value.

I have a value—it is 48 guineas—because I was born before the national health service was established and I have the bill that my mother had to pay to bring me into this world. The debate continues about whether that was overpriced or underpriced but, be that as it may, there is little debate about the price of adopting the Tory philosophy.

The Tories talk much of queues. I am a mathematician—that is something of which members have heard a little lately. Is it not ironic that the mathematical theory that relates to the manipulation and management of queues is called the Monte Carlo theory? The Tories would make us subject to the dictates of the roulette wheel. Their proposals and ideas have been comprehensively rejected in the past and will be again at 5 o'clock.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We must now move to wind-up speeches. I have noted the members who were not called, to ensure that they are called the next time that they are on the list of members who wish to speak.

11:24

**Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP):** The real issue in the debate is whether, in the next 10 to 20 years, public services in Scotland and Britain will be public. I take nothing away from Mr Monteith, but the drive for privatisation of public services comes not from the Scottish Tories, but from organisations that represent transnational corporations, the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund, and from agreements such as the general agreement on trade in services.

That international process has opened up in the past 10 to 15 years because companies want access to big markets that involve billions of pounds. They want to open up public services to private capital. That process has taken place for years and across continents. We should be clear about the fact that every party in the Parliament, except the SSP, has signed up to that.

**Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):** Will the member join me in congratulating the Scottish Executive on its liaison with the Department of Trade and Industry to ensure that public services were not offered up in the latest round of negotiations? I understand that the Government has no intention of offering up such services under GATS. I have been actively involved in GATS matters, as every member will know.

**Frances Curran:** I hope that time is added to my speech because of that intervention. I remember that, in opposition, Labour opposed PFI and PPP. I say to the Tories that it is early days. In

a few years, Labour might agree to the Tories' passports.

The debate is about whose version of private enterprise in public services is the right version to adopt and for parties to defend. Everything else in the debate is a technicality. Perhaps the Tories should be disqualified from debates on public services, given the destruction that they wreaked for 20 years. They propose passports for health services and for schools; next, they will suggest visas for universities and I have no doubt that the list will continue.

**Mr Monteith:** They are called scholarships.

**Frances Curran:** I will come to that.

I remember when the national health service was genuinely national, before Thatcher. People could be referred anywhere in the country for treatment and expertise in whatever condition they had. However, good old Mrs Thatcher introduced the internal market, which put paid to such referrals. Now, people will not be able just to be referred—they will need a passport to cross the boundaries in the internal market.

The issue of choice is a red herring and a joke. Many members spoke about it. Why should anybody have to choose between a good hospital and a bad hospital? Why should anybody have to choose between a good school and a bad school? The point is that nobody should have to make such choices. We should put policies in place not to emphasise such choices, but to overcome them.

**Mr Davidson** *rose*—

**Frances Curran:** I am sorry; I have less time for my speech than speakers from all the other parties have. I might let the member intervene in a minute if I cover all my other points.

The Tories' health passport means top-up fees for the NHS. Their school passport means top-up fees for education through schools. That is all that passports will mean. They are no different from any other proposal from Westminster.

The Tories' ideas will not be accepted immediately, but the fact is that Labour has accepted PFI and PPP into the health service. Hundreds of thousands of NHS workers—the 40,000 who work for Sodexo, the 20,000 who work for Compass and the 10,000 who work for ISS—have average wages of £8,800, £9,000 and £10,000 as a result of the PFI and PPP policies. Where is their choice to have a hip operation that costs £8,000? We all know who will have the choice—it will not be the health service workers who do the mopping and cleaning and who look after people in hospital beds. We should reject PFI and PPP.

How can members look at themselves in the mirror when they defend PFI and PPP and the idea that the private sector should make three to 10 times more money out of us and our health service than it would make from investing in the stock exchange? The private sector is making those sorts of figures on those contracts.

Even more so, on the issues of democracy, transparency and open government, how on earth can the Tories defend PFI and PPP at the Edinburgh royal infirmary? People who are appalled at the level of service at the hospital cannot even get a look at the contract because of commercial confidentiality. It is an absolute disgrace that the community partnership cannot get access to the contract.

The SSP is campaigning to have every PFI and every PPP closed. We want public services to be funded with public money. Let us reverse the trend.

11:30

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** Let me begin by saying that it is good to be able to debate important issues that affect Scotland on their merits and not on how they fit into the interminable constitutional debate and argument of the separatists, whether they are of the red or the tartan variety.

To be quite frank, we have had today an excessive demonstration from the SNP of the total irrelevance of their policies on public services. I thought that they might have liked the idea of passports. In view of their constitutional desire to separate nation state from nation state, one could imagine that passports might be the sort of thing that would appeal to them.

In my newspapers today, I read a blast from the past. The now ennobled Michael Forsyth is calling for Scottish members of the Westminster Parliament to take over the role of members of the Scottish Parliament. It was a timely reminder of the context in which the work of the Parliament and the challenge of the Scottish Executive is set. As the Tories keep reminding us, we cannot escape responsibility for the problems of the present by invoking the spectres of the past. That is true, but it is equally true that one cannot undo in five year the damage that was done in the previous 20 years.

Let me be clear: the major problem in our schools, hospitals, youth services and transport system today is the legacy of long-term structural under-investment. There was under-investment in buildings and equipment and, above all, in staff. As the Tories acknowledged, those problems are being tackled by record levels of investment in our public services. Gradually and steadily we are

renewing the facilities and buildings of our schools, hospitals and trains. Steadily, we are increasing support for the voluntary sector, the value of which was challenged and derided by Mrs Thatcher when she said that there was

“no such thing as society.”

The botched privatisation of the railways was a stark example of how the market in so-called choice works in the public sector. That demonstrated all of the fallacies of the arguments that are being put forward today.

**Mr Monteith:** Will the member give way?

**Robert Brown:** No, I will press on a bit.

What is the policy of the new Michael Howard Tories? It is not to improve the school curriculum, it is not to encourage more people into the science and engineering careers that the country needs, nor is it to reform arrangements for children with additional support needs so that they can reach their full potential. Their policy is not to deal with the major issues that are caused by the proper commitment to reduce junior doctors' hours, it is not to tackle hospital-acquired infections and it is not to improve our county's health. The policy of the new Michael Howard Tories is to have another reorganisation—another internal market with an external market tacked on.

David McLetchie says that we should lever in additional resources. I notice that he did not stay to hear other member's contributions to the debate. In fact, the Tories' passport policy is a mechanism to lever resources out of our public services. Patient passports and education vouchers will incur dead-weight costs from the people who have chosen private provision.

**Mr Davidson:** Is it not a scandal that pensioners have to sell their homes to buy the quality of care that they need in their later years?

**Robert Brown:** Of course it is; that is why the Executive has made a commitment to provide free personal care, which will make a big difference in that respect.

The point is that vouchers are a subsidy for the few that are funded by the taxes of the many at the expense of the public sector. It is perfectly acceptable that private provision should be a choice that is available to people if they want to make that choice. That should not, however, be at the expense of the public sector.

Brian Monteith has appeared to be grossly indignant during the debate—he has been muttering “private insurance” throughout. It is understandable that private health insurance is taken up by quite a lot of people. Quite a lot of employers and even a number of unions provide such insurance. Indeed, it is possible to get private

health insurance for dogs and cats these days.

For most of the elderly and disabled people who need the resources, private health insurance can be a chimera. Many more older people live in poverty than is the case among the rest of the population and many older people cannot afford private health insurance. Even if they could, such insurance is significantly more expensive for them, with costs of between £1,200 and £10,000 being quoted. Even Oliver Letwin, the Tory shadow chancellor, admitted recently about those policies:

“we need to get very much more detailed in how they ... will work and what they will cost and what benefits they will bring”.

I could not have put it better myself.

The Conservative policy fails all the tests that they have set. Despite what David McLetchie said, their policy would grossly widen health and education inequalities. It would like a leech suck money out of public services and reduce choice for the vast majority. At the same time, it would subsidise choice for the few. The Conservative policy would devastate our schools and hospitals; it would starve schools in the areas that are most deprived of resources and it would reduce opportunities for access to good quality health care. The policy is a blast from the past—it is a failed policy that would not work and it would have devastating consequences on our public services. I urge Parliament to show what it thinks of the Conservatives’ new policies under Michael Howard by rejecting the motion that is before us.

11:36

**Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** I start by disagreeing whole-heartedly with Kenneth Macintosh, who suggested that there was some evidence that the Tories had repented and that the consequences of that should be welcomed. I fail to see the difference between the proposals that we heard about today and what the Tories did when they were in power. We are still talking about fundholding practices, albeit that they would be called by another name. We are still talking about the internal market, which is a passport to privatisation anyway. There is nothing new in what the Tories said. Their policies failed: they were rejected by the electorate and they will be rejected again in the future.

**Mary Scanlon:** Will the member give way?

**Brian Adam:** No, I want to develop my arguments. I might give way later.

On this occasion, I found myself in agreement with much of what Peter Peacock said. I agree with his analysis of the Tories’ position on choice in education. Mr Peacock might find that difficult to believe. Does that stick in the craw a bit, minister?

The reality is that, apart from in urban Scotland, there is very little choice in education. One of the weaknesses of our education system is the big divide that is to be found in our major cities between the private, independent and public schools—whatever label we want to give them—and the schools that are provided by Government finance. The publicly funded schools suffer as a consequence.

I have no idea how the Tories envisage people being able to exercise choice in education or health simply by moving around the country. If mobility is a fundamental requirement in exercising choice, would the Tories provide additional funds to enable people to move around the country? Given what the Conservatives said earlier, I think that that is unlikely.

**Mary Scanlon:** Will the member take an intervention now?

**Brian Adam:** No, thank you.

Perhaps we are seeing a return to the Tories “on your bike” approach. Perhaps kids are going to be told to get out their bikes and cycle 11 miles—or perhaps a lot further than that in rural areas—to get to school.

To develop the point that was made by John Swinburne, I will be interested to hear how people who need double hip operations can get on their bikes. People in Grampian cannot get those services whereas in other parts of Scotland there is only a year’s wait. The choices that the Tories presented today are the same kind of false choices that Mrs Thatcher presented while she was in power. It was not, “Would you like to buy your council house?” but “How would you like to buy your council house?” Today’s debate is not, “Would you like to get some sort of private education?” it is “How would you like to buy your education?” It is not about whether people want to buy private health care insurance but about how they can buy it.

I was disappointed in one aspect of Peter Peacock’s speech—he took a complacent attitude to the PFI and PPP failures in education. He said that he was happy with progress. Perhaps I could draw his attention to a report that was published this week, which suggested that 40 per cent of secondary 2 pupils have failed to reach level E in English reading, 49 per cent have fallen behind that target in English writing and 46 per cent have failed to reach the target in mathematics. Given that the target was only 80 per cent attainment, the target was not very high anyway. Is that the kind of progress with which Mr Peacock is happy?

There are now significant failures in the PFI/PPP process. The major contractor for Glasgow schools has gone belly-up—Amey plc has disappeared. I am disappointed by the attitude that

the Liberal Democrats had to the situation in East Lothian. I thought that their laughter demeaned the position that the pupils in East Lothian will find themselves in when application has to be made to the SQA for relief from the difficulties that have arisen as a consequence of the potential lack of access to schools. We are dealing with serious matters. The only benefits that might come from PFI/PPP depend on competition and that competition does not exist—the marketplace cannot currently deliver it.

**Johann Lamont:** There are different interpretations of the levels of attainment in S1 and S2 throughout Scotland. Is the member seriously saying that those figures are being affected by the way in which the buildings in which the students work have been paid for? Does he not recognise that there is benefit in having buildings that match the talents and abilities of our young people?

**Brian Adam:** I am sorry if I did not explain myself well—I was making two separate points. One was that the levels of attainment are not those which Peter Peacock set as his targets—it is a miserable failure that those targets have not been met. In addition, PFI/PPP will not achieve the delivery of proper education in proper facilities.

I agree with Carolyn Leckie that we need to have a debate about where we are going with our health service. We need to address the question of continued centralisation. Many members from all parties are concerned about the loss of local services. It is fine to drive up standards and it is great that we have royal colleges that are keen to do that but if, as a consequence, we cannot have services delivered locally, we need seriously to consider the situation. There are border issues, as David Davidson mentioned, but the privatisation approach will not address that. We need to have a national debate. I conclude on that point.

11:42

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm):** I thank the Conservatives for giving us the opportunity to expose their unfair, uncosted and unworkable policies on health, education and crime, although it turns out that they had little to say about the latter, except on there being a directly elected element to police boards. At that point, I agreed for once with Shona Robison when she said that they were acting under orders from Michael Howard because all members of police boards in Scotland, unlike in England, are already elected as councillors.

The Conservatives had a little more to say about education, but it was still “simplistic tosh” as Judith Gillespie said the other day. It was not thought through and David McLetchie had no answer

when Rhona Brankin asked him about people not having the right to send their child to their local school. We believe in increasing choice in schools, we believe in appropriate choice between schools and, most of all, we believe in raising standards in all schools.

James Douglas-Hamilton asked what we had achieved since 1999. We have free school places for all our three and four-year-olds; we have classroom assistants in all our schools; we have smaller class sizes; we have more young people sitting exams and getting qualifications; we have more young people getting better grades; we have more young people going to university; and we have year-on-year improvements in literacy and numeracy standards from the disastrous legacy of the most recent Conservative Government.

As always, there was complete distortion today of what we are saying and doing: for example, in relation to the independent health sector, which we are prepared to use on an equitable basis; in relation to centralisation, which I will describe in a moment; and most of all according to the terms of today’s motion, in relation to what we are saying and doing about choice.

Let us be clear about the dividing lines: we believe in choice for all, but the Conservatives believe in choice for those who can afford to pay. The people whom they will support in the independent sector would still have to pay thousands of pounds out of their pockets. Choice is illustrated for us in the action that we took in setting up the national waiting times database so that patients can choose, if they wish, to go to a different hospital in Scotland where there is a shorter waiting time.

However, there is a second dividing line because patients want choice, but they want more than that. That is why they want to influence directly the nature of the care and services that they receive. That is why we place such emphasis on learning from the experience of patients and on involving them in redesigning specific services.

I was pleased to speak to patients and clinicians at the launch of the managed clinical network for stroke and coronary heart disease in Glasgow. Clinicians and patients there are making decisions at the front line. That is also an example of better links across traditional boundaries. That work will be carried forward next year as we set up community health partnerships to bring a new focus to local decision making and delivery.

It is a great pity that David McLetchie was not at the launch of the managed clinical network for stroke and coronary heart disease in Glasgow. Once again, he was running down everything that the health service does. I tell him that the chair of the national advisory committee on stroke said

recently that Scotland is currently doing more for stroke services than any other country in the world except Norway, through the stroke strategy, the extra investment in the stroke strategy, the stroke managed clinical networks, the stroke standards that are being developed by NHS Quality Improvement Scotland and because of the national stroke audit.

**Mr Davidson:** I take the minister back to the point about patients having choice through the waiting times database. Will that choice exist from the day that patients are diagnosed as having a condition that needs further treatment instead of their having an arbitrary six or nine-month wait?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** Once again, the Conservatives show a complete lack of knowledge about what is happening. I mentioned the waiting times database—that information is available in GP surgeries. GPs and patients can access that information together today and that gives them choice.

The Conservative motion calls for the setting up of foundation hospitals. I say to the Conservatives that we have our own reform agenda in Scotland and that we do not take lectures from London, as they do from their party leader. We support a single health system that breaks down traditional barriers rather than a centralised one. We support patient journeys that are integrated across traditional boundaries and we support decision making at the front line, as is happening in managed clinical networks and which will happen in community health partnerships.

The key to change is to give health care teams support to solve old problems in new ways. We support, value and empower staff—a point on which I agree with Carolyn Leckie. That is precisely what the centre for change and innovation has been doing for the past year. It has undertaken 10 major programmes of work with front-line staff to secure practical changes and to improve waiting times and care of patients with specific illnesses.

The SNP asked about recruitment and retention of staff. In the latest year, there have been 572 doctors and 956 extra nurses employed, which is almost unprecedented in the past decade or two in the health service. The SNP talked about a national strategy—Sandra White talked particularly about maternity services. We have a national maternity strategy, which we outlined in a white paper. There will be another detailed piece of work on the back of that.

The SNP asked for a debate. In *The Herald* on Monday, I said that I supported a public debate on the important issues of service reorganisation; it must be a serious debate that has at its heart clinical safety and quality of care, as well as local

access wherever that is consistent with those principles.

**Shona Robison:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I have only one minute left.

On reorganisation and the health service more generally, we heard the typical unbalanced approach from the SNP. Christine Grahame was even laughing at herself by the end of her speech as she talked about dirty hospitals, but she did not talk about the new national standards on clean hospitals or about many other things that are driving up standards of care. Shona Robison once again ran down the new Edinburgh royal infirmary. I do not have time to read out the letter about that in *The Scotsman* today, but I hope that she has time to do so later.

Both the SNP and the SSP showed their usual ideological opposition to PPP. That opposition would slow down modernisation of our health infrastructure and that is not what patients want. It is not all PPP—total capital investment in health by the traditional route will be £400 million by 2005-06, which is more than double that in 1997-98 and includes £87 million for the new Beatson oncology centre.

Across the board, we support a focus on patients, pupils and victims first. We support equal access rather than access based on ability to pay. We support national standards and inspections as a framework that underpins the devolution of decision making to front-line staff, and we support sharing of best practice and action to tackle poor performance.

We do not support the abolition of comprehensive health and education systems, as advocated by David McLetchie, and we do not advocate patient passports to penalise the poor. The clearest choices relate to health. We advocate a modern NHS, whereas the Tories advocate the end of the NHS. We advocate equal access, whereas the Tories advocate access that is dependent on ability to pay. We advocate choice for all, whereas the Tories advocate choice for those who can afford to pay for it. I know what the people of Scotland support and what they will continue to support.

11:50

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am pleased to take part in this debate; it has been thoroughly useful.

Today has been an important day in the life of this young Parliament. In time, it will be seen as the day that confirmed that the Conservative party is the true Opposition party in Parliament. Many members know that Labour and Liberal Democrat members will privately welcome the fact that we are the true Opposition party.

It is a pity that we did not have this debate last week, when the SNP had the chance to debate public services. Yet again, the SNP decided to discuss constitutional matters. Have we been graced by the presence of the leader or the deputy leader of the SNP to show the significance of public services to that party? I do not see them.

**Shona Robison:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Monteith:** No. I want to carry on and make progress. I have only 10 minutes.

I am no Nostradamus, but I can tell that today is the beginning of a new future. David McLetchie has laid before Parliament a different approach and has offered the Scottish people a choice. I accept that things will take time, but we will see whether the Scottish people warm to our proposals and vote for them. It is important to give an alternative view of how public services can be delivered to the Scottish people.

As Robert Brown explained, the SNP offers more of the same, but with a different passport, which is meaningless because it must be stamped by Frankfurt and Brussels at every juncture. It would have no value whatsoever.

**Mike Rumbles:** Would the patient passport as designed by the Conservative party—which would take people out of the national health service—hit at the poor and the poorest people in Scotland, who cannot afford private health care?

**Mr Monteith:** That was a singularly inept intervention that was not pertinent to the point that I am making. However, I will come in due course to the issue that Mike Rumbles raises.

I am no Nostradamus or Mystic Meg. However, even before the amendments were lodged, it was fairly easy to predict the line of attack that the other parties would take on the Conservatives' motion. First, they would challenge the motives of Conservative MSPs and politicians and our commitment to public services. Of course, that is the low moral ground; it involves scaremongering but not challenging with real debate. My family—my sons, my father and sister—all went to the same local state school. There are teachers and further education lecturers in the Conservative

party. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton's four sons were born in the Western general hospital, using the NHS. The Conservative party is full of members who are committed to public services. We do not challenge members' motives when they say that they want better public services. All we say is that we want better public services, too.

After our motives, the next line of attack would surely be to say that nothing is wrong, that more money is being made available and that things are getting better. Many members have explained how things are getting worse, so I do not need to do so. We have acknowledged that more money has been spent and we have also said that, when we were in power, we spent more money, too.

However, from that period, we have identified that simply spending more money does not bring the necessary results that the public not only want but deserve. If anybody doubts that, I will give some examples. The Minister for Health and Community Care holds a Lothian seat. In the NHS in Lothian, the median wait for orthopaedic surgery has increased by 43.7 per cent and the median wait for outpatient appointments with a dermatology consultant has increased by 28 per cent. The median wait for outpatient appointments with an ear, nose and throat specialist has increased and vacancies for qualified radiographers have increased. Nursing and midwife staff vacancies have also increased.

**Shona Robison:** Given that the member's facts are absolutely correct, how will the situation improve if doctors are taken out of the NHS and go into the private sector? Would waiting times increase under the Conservatives' proposals?

**Mr Monteith:** The answer is no. I will explain why that is so as I proceed.

Members doubt our motives and challenge the unchallengeable fact that things have been getting worse in many ways. However, the next line of attack is that the Conservatives will privatise public services. Many people have echoed that point, which is more scaremongering. Are we talking about the private health service that we know and love, in which GP surgeries are private professional practices that are contracted by the NHS and in which GPs build their own surgeries to provide services to the NHS? Are we talking about an NHS that provides a voucher in everything but name to private opticians for provision of spectacles? Many services are already provided by private contractors throughout the NHS. There is no question of privatising something that is already provided by many private practitioners. Therefore, the argument does not stack up.

The next argument was also predictable—that our proposals would be divisive and that the Conservatives are somehow scary people who

offer extreme policies. Strangely enough, such policies have been adopted in Sweden, where there are education vouchers, and in Denmark and the Netherlands, where communities can deliver local schools. I say to Mr Rumbles that I am talking about rural and urban communities.

**Rhona Brankin** *rose*—

**Mike Rumbles** *rose*—

**Mr Monteith:** I want to finish what I am saying.

Such policies have been adopted in Alabama and in Florida, where education vouchers are so popular that campaigns are springing up in states throughout the United States to introduce education vouchers. In Chicago, the school system allows parents to choose schools without catchment areas and in New Zealand, local communities run schools. Such places are not populated by scary and extreme politicians, but by people who are looking to deliver public services that meet people's aspirations.

**Rhona Brankin:** Under the Tory's education voucher system, which is designed to introduce a free market, how would education vouchers work for pupils for whom there are significant extra costs as a result of their special educational needs or additional support needs? Costs for them would be much higher. Would such pupils be given two or three vouchers?

**Mr Monteith:** We would not abolish records of needs, but we would protect such children so that money reached them. Records of needs should not be taken away from many of the most vulnerable children in our society.

Finally, the next line of attack that one could see coming was that our policies are not Scottish. It is clear that we have a separate education system and that the process of coming up with policies—

**Dr Murray** *rose*—

**Mr Monteith:** The member may not go to the toilet.

In developing our policies for higher education and education in general, it is clear that we have taken account of the separate nature of Scottish education. In explaining our justice policies, Annabel Goldie explained that we acknowledge the differences in how the justice system in Scotland is run. We take account of such matters and our policies are tailored, thought up and delivered for Scotland.

If I move on, Presiding Officer—

**The Presiding Officer:** You have five seconds.

**Mr Monteith:** A lot more than five seconds.

The Conservatives have a vision in which patients choose the treatment and the hospital that

they want, where pupils can access the type of education that is best suited to their talents and where the people of Scotland can—through accountable police conveners—deliver the policing policies that they desire.

I believe that that is far more worthy than the policies currently offered by the Executive and I believe that our policies will in time gain the support of the Scottish people.



## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Prime Minister (Meetings)

#### 1. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):

To ask the First Minister when he next plans to meet the Prime Minister and what issues he intends to raise. (S2F-435)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** I speak with the Prime Minister regularly and when we next meet I am sure that I will want to record with him the continuing contribution that the United Kingdom Government makes to our public services here in Scotland—a deficit between receipts and expenditure of some £8,000 million was recorded yesterday—all of which would be put at risk if we were to move to the economic policies of the Scottish nationalist party.

**Mr Swinney:** That tells us all that we need to know about the economic miracles that that crowd delivers for the Scottish economy.

In the partnership document, the Government's flagship education pledge is to increase the number of teachers in our schools from 50,000 to 53,000. The pledge goes on to state that the additional 3,000 teachers will be targeted to reduce class sizes in secondary 1 and S2 in English and mathematics and in primary 1. Will the First Minister guarantee to Parliament that every one of those 3,000 additional teachers will have a teaching qualification?

**The First Minister:** There are clear rules about the teaching qualifications that teachers in Scottish schools must have. As I have said in the past—when I was Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs and since I have become First Minister—I believe strongly that we must ensure not only that we maintain high standards but that more people have the opportunity to join the teaching profession in Scotland. Where there are rules that are, in my view, wrong and out of date that prevent people with relevant experience and relevant qualifications from moving into teaching qualifications to allow them to teach in our schools, the rules should be changed by the General Teaching Council for Scotland, which is the responsible professional body.

**Mr Swinney:** I am interested in the First Minister's answer, because the rules that he says exist to guarantee that teachers in our schools have the appropriate qualifications are in the process of being abolished by his Administration.

Regulations 5(1) and 6(1) of the Schools (Scotland) Code 1956, which the Government is abolishing, specifically require teachers to have a

recognised teaching qualification. It is far from clear from the First Minister's answer that there will be a requirement for teachers to have a teaching qualification.

I ask the First Minister for the second time whether he will give me a guarantee that all the additional 3,000 new teachers, who will be used to reduce class sizes to honour his commitment to make the transition from primary school to secondary school a great deal easier, will have a recognised teaching qualification.

**The First Minister:** We have a regular problem in the chamber in respect of the Scottish National Party leader listening to what is said. It is clear not only that teachers in Scotland must have, and have, the highest possible quality of teaching qualifications, but that their qualifications are a lot better than those of their counterparts south of the border and in many other countries. If people such as John Swinney were to stop running down Scotland's schools and Scotland's teachers, our teachers might get some credit for the standards that they employ in our classrooms.

Mr Swinney's comments are a diversion from the real division in the chamber. His party has told us for 12 months that the Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration is wrong to target S1 and S2 in secondary schools as being the top priority in trying to improve attainment in our schools. That his party is wrong and that S1 and S2 should remain the top priority can be proved by the figures that were published this week, which show that there is better attainment than for many years. That is still not good enough, and we are going to deliver.

**Mr Swinney:** The only diversion there was the First Minister refusing to answer a serious and legitimate question.

If everything is as simple and straightforward as the First Minister is making out, why has the General Teaching Council for Scotland sought legal advice about its ability to stop the abolition of the code that regulates the qualification of teachers? Why did the Scottish Parent Teacher Council say:

"Parents would be outraged to discover that people were teaching subjects in which they had no proper expertise"?

Those are serious issues and a rant about other Government priorities is no replacement for answers to serious and legitimate questions. For the third time, I ask the First Minister whether the 3,000 additional teachers, for whom there is no training provision in the budget, have recognised teaching qualifications—yes or no?

**The First Minister:** I have already answered the question. It is simply untrue that there is no provision to train those teachers. Our plans are

properly designed and costed and properly targeted on the teachers that are most needed in our schools, and on the school years that most need them. Those teachers are important for Scotland's schools and for our pupils.

It is clear that Scotland's teachers have the best qualifications in the UK, and they will remain in that position. Those Scottish teachers do a very good job and Mr Swinney should stop talking down their work and Scotland's schools.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

#### 2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)

**(Con):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-434)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** Not surprisingly, Cabinet will continue to discuss the progress of the partnership agreement and our legislative programme, at the centre of which is our commitment to an improved and diverse comprehensive system of education for all, and an improved and diverse national health service for all. From this morning's debate, I notice that that vision differs greatly from that which was put across by Mr McLetchie's party.

**David McLetchie:** It does indeed, and it is a pity that the First Minister did not have a passport to the chamber for that debate, because he and I could then have discussed it for the best part of a couple of hours.

I have a specific and important concern relating to the protection of our children to raise with the First Minister. As he will be aware, the new Sexual Offences Bill at Westminster will make it an offence for an adult to take on a new identity in cyberspace chatrooms in order to meet children—so-called internet grooming. However, that legislation will apply only in England and Wales. Did the Cabinet consider a similar strengthening of the law in Scotland by inviting Westminster to legislate for Scotland in that bill, so that the law is the same throughout the United Kingdom at one and the same time, and so that there are no gaps in the law that can be exploited by those who would prey on vulnerable children?

**The First Minister:** Yes, we considered that, and we decided that it would be correct for us to pursue our own legislative route to ensure that there are new and tougher penalties in Scotland. We are currently considering those penalties. I want there to be no doubt in the chamber or anywhere else that we intend to be part of the international crackdown on internet pornography and internet grooming. When we have decided on the right legislative route and sentencing provisions, we will bring them before the

Parliament, and I hope that all members will support us.

**David McLetchie:** I welcome part of the First Minister's answer, but people will be disappointed that the opportunity has not been taken to liaise with the Home Office and introduce legislative measures at this stage. There is a real concern that a gap might develop between the law north of the border and the law south of the border, and that that gap might be exploited. The First Minister will be aware that the issue of child protection was carefully and seriously debated in the chamber only a few weeks ago.

I urge the First Minister to indicate how long he envisages the review of the law in Scotland will take. I suggest that the review is done as a matter of urgency, as that would send out the strongest possible message to those who would prey on children that we in Scotland take the matter as seriously as people in England do, and that those who offend will be sent to prison for up to 10 years for their offences, as will happen down south.

**The First Minister:** Before dealing with Mr McLetchie's question, I want to say that I recognise that he has genuine reasons for raising this matter and that I am pleased that he has chosen a proper subject to ask questions about.

That said, I do not want anyone who will read this exchange, or who is listening to it in the chamber or watching it at home on TV, to get the impression that there is a gap in Scots law on this matter. There is no such gap. Cases have been prosecuted recently; indeed, one was prosecuted under the common law of Scotland. Moreover, provisions in the Telecommunications Act 1984 relating to fraud and breaches of the peace can be used to prosecute such cases in Scotland.

We believe that it is right to consider going further and possibly introducing a specific offence. However, we will approach that matter carefully and with due consideration. As far as this aspect of sentencing is concerned, it is right to have a specific Scottish provision rather than use a provision that was agreed at Westminster and is particularly relevant to England and Wales. Introducing such legislation will toughen up the law and deal with internet grooming. In this chamber, we should stand united in saying that internet grooming is unacceptable and that Scots law must treat it just as seriously as it is treated anywhere else, if not more so.

**Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** Will the next meeting of the Cabinet discuss the continued downturn in the electronics industry? Does the First Minister share my regret at yesterday's announcement of 250 redundancies at Sanmina-SCI UK in my constituency, and will he ensure that those who have been made

redundant will receive the appropriate support? Moreover, will he confirm that an area such as Greenock and Inverclyde, which has higher than average levels of unemployment for Scotland and has also suffered disproportionately from the decline in the electronics industry, will benefit from specific measures to strengthen the local economy?

**The First Minister:** Clearly the usual services, which have been so successful in other areas in assisting those who have needed to find new work or new training for new opportunities, will be provided in Inverclyde as they have been elsewhere. I want to send a strong message to those who have been affected that those measures have been successful elsewhere and can be successful again in these circumstances.

Duncan McNeil will also want me to re-emphasise our commitment to measures such as the completion of the M74 motorway and other improvements in transport, and investment in the Inverclyde area and in other areas of serious deprivation in Scotland. Those areas require such investment to ensure both that communities are regenerated and that companies can get goods to and through market more quickly. We will continue that investment, which I am sure will have the member's support.

**Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind):** At the next meeting of the Cabinet, will the First Minister raise the case of one of my constituents who, since an operation 10 months ago, has been grossly incontinent of urine but has been told that there is no money for a sphincter operation? How can it be that, even after NHS Greater Glasgow and the Minister for Health and Community Care have been notified of the case, this man still does not have a date for a repair operation? Does the First Minister agree that no one in 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland should be made to suffer such indignity for so long?

**The First Minister:** It is always difficult to comment on the circumstances of individual cases. If the case has been described accurately and someone now requires an operation as a result of another operation that they underwent, I think that the matter should be treated as a priority. I am sure that the Minister for Health and Community Care will want to look into the case and give a response as quickly as possible.

### Air Travel

**3. Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** To ask the First Minister how the active promotion of air travel in Scotland leading to projected increases in such travel and increased greenhouse gas emissions is consistent with the Scottish Executive's policy of reducing such emissions and addressing climate change. (S2F-447)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** We are committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and a number of actions have been put in place to assist the international programme to achieve that aim. However, we are also committed to making improvements in transport options. Our investment in air travel is designed to sustain rural communities in particular, and complements our investment in rail and other forms of transport.

**Robin Harper:** I thank the First Minister for his answer. However, our research has calculated that the UK air industry receives £9 billion per annum in hidden annual subsidies, which is about three times greater than the subsidies that are enjoyed by the rail industry, which are among the lowest in Europe. What steps will he take to ensure that our sustainable rail industry can at least compete on a level playing field with a less sustainable air travel industry?

**The First Minister:** I am certain that issues will be debated over the years, not just in relation to the taxation regimes that are in place but on the rate of progress that is being made on aviation fuel, as that would make a contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. However, we can reduce the reliance on air travel of large numbers of passengers by improving our rail network. That is why it is so important to pursue the modernisation of the west coast main line. That improvement to our rail infrastructure will make a difference to the apparent need for people to use air travel when rail could be a viable option. I hope that we will get the chance to see those improvements make a difference in the years to come.

**Robin Harper:** Does that mean that the First Minister will sit down with his colleagues at Westminster to see what further action can be taken to make the rail routes between Scotland and London fully competitive with the air routes?

**The First Minister:** In our submission to the chancellor on his budget for this year, we did not make representations on the level of subsidy or on taxation in relation to aviation fuel and other forms of vehicle fuel. I think that that is probably the point that Mr Harper makes. We do not believe, as I believe the Green party does, that there should be a minimum air fare of about £150 for all air travel. There are parts of Scotland where air travel is required for people's basic needs, particularly in our island and rural communities. I want us to get the right balance between our concerted attempt to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and making sure that we have sustainable travel options to and from our islands, just as we have to and from our cities.

**Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP):** The First Minister will be aware of a study from Highlands and Islands Enterprise that showed that

the annual climatic cost of a year's worth of travel to and from every airport in the Highlands and Islands is less than that of one day's worth of transatlantic travel from Heathrow.

On the distinct needs and wants of the Highlands and Islands, given that the airports in the Highlands and Islands receive an annual subsidy of £24 million, of which £2 million is spent on security, is it not about time that appropriate security for the likes of Barra and Benbecula is decided locally, rather than have foisted upon those airports the security that is necessary for Birmingham and Bristol?

**The First Minister:** Of course, Mr MacAskill could have chosen Glasgow or Edinburgh but, regrettably, he chose again to pose a sensible question about a serious issue in anti-English terms. That is unfortunate. There is a serious issue about security in Scotland's small airports, but that issue should be dealt with on the basis of airport security and the costs that are involved, not on the basis of some crazy Scottish-English comparison.

We have made representations in the past, and continue to do so, about security provisions that are required at small airports. Although it would be wrong for the United Kingdom Government and those who are responsible for those security provisions to amend them without due consideration, we believe that the security provisions at the airports in the Highlands and Islands in particular could be more suited to the size of the airports and the costs that are involved. As I said, we continue to make those representations and we hope that security arrangements can be amended at an appropriate moment.

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** Does the First Minister agree that no one should fly from Edinburgh or Glasgow to London, and that no one would do so if there was a fast, reliable rail service from city centre to city centre? I was pleased to hear him back the west coast main line upgrade, but we want the east coast main line upgrade to follow shortly. Will the Executive press for the spinal high-speed rail link, if it is ever developed, to extend far enough north to be of use to Scotland?

**The First Minister:** Clearly, we wish to see improvements across the railway network, east and west, but I think that everyone has agreed that we must progress those improvements in order of priority. The link between Glasgow and London is fundamental for a variety of important reasons in relation to the Scottish economy, passenger travel, greenhouse gas emission and all sorts of other matters, which is why that route is the immediate priority of the UK Government and of our

Government in Scotland. We hope to progress other improvements in due course.

#### **Emergency Workers (Protection)**

**4. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what criteria will be used to determine the scope of the proposed bill to protect emergency workers. (S2F-453)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** All attacks on workers who are delivering a public service are taken very seriously, both by prosecutors and by the courts. The place where the crime is committed and the fact that a worker is providing a service to the public are regarded as aggravating factors, and those who commit such offences should be under no doubt that the law will be used. The consultation document that was published on Monday proposes tougher penalties in emergency situations in which workers need to be able to carry out their duties without fear or hindrance and in which other life or property would be placed at risk as a result of an assault.

**Pauline McNeill:** Does the First Minister agree that the law should severely punish any person who attacks an emergency worker who is acting to save lives and that there is an urgent need to legislate on that? Does he also agree that we should act quickly to protect other public sector workers who face violence in the line of duty and that any review should be wide ranging to include nurses, doctors and other workers who deliver a service to the public? Will he assure me that he will continue to work closely with the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the unions—as I know that he has done—to ensure that we have in place the right laws and other policies so that public sector workers have the confidence of knowing that the Government regards their safety in serving the public as a priority?

**The First Minister:** We will continue to discuss those proposals with the trade unions involved, which have been central to our discussions in coming forward with the proposals. I re-emphasise the fact that nurses, doctors and others who work in the public services are covered by the provision that was introduced by the Lord Advocate in February, which states that an offence against them in the line of their work should be considered an aggravating factor in any case of assault.

It is vital that we clamp down on cases of assault in whatever circumstances they occur. However, there are particular circumstances in which an assault on an emergency worker who is responding to an emergency situation has an impact on many other people, not just on the person who is assaulted. In those situations, the offence should be considered more severe.

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** If it is enacted, the proposed bill will change the criminal law of Scotland. I understand that the Minister for Justice will not lead the bill through the parliamentary process, following the example of the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill. Why is the First Minister bypassing the Minister for Justice on these important issues and, consequently, disregarding the justice committees as the proper mechanism for first scrutiny?

**The First Minister:** Our Minister for Justice is, quite rightly, concentrating on and busy with the reforms to our courts, our police service, our fire service and many other services that ensure not only that the public is safe, but that criminals are prosecuted properly in Scotland. Those reforms will—unlike the tokenistic reform that was suggested by the Conservatives this morning of electing one member of the different police boards in Scotland—make a real difference in our courts, by getting police back on the beat, by freeing up police officers to carry out their duties, and by ensuring that our Procurator Fiscal Service delivers more prosecutions on time in a system that is run properly. Those are the reforms that we need in Scotland, and the Minister for Justice is going to deliver them.

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** Will the First Minister tell us whether there will be anything in the proposed bill or in guidance to address police response times in answering urgent calls for assistance from another emergency service, given the length of time that was taken by the police to respond to the fire crew who faced a despicable criminal attack in Coatbridge last Sunday evening?

**The First Minister:** I do not think that the bill is designed to cover response times; however, the reforms that we are carrying out will improve response times. If fewer police officers are sitting around in court rooms wasting their time, or carrying out administrative and other duties that others should be carrying out, they can get back on the beat or to other operational duties. If there is better co-ordination between the police and the other emergency and security services, those response times will improve, more criminals will be caught on the spot and more incidents will be stopped before they get worse. Those are the reforms on which we have embarked, and they will make a difference in every community in Scotland.

### Drink Driving

**5. John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Executive is taking to reduce drink driving over the festive period. (S2F-449)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland is conducting an enforcement campaign to prevent people from driving under the influence of drink or drugs from 8 December to 5 January. We are supporting the police campaign through complementary publicity about drink driving that has been arranged by the Scottish road safety campaign.

**John Farquhar Munro:** I thank the First Minister for that positive response. He will be aware that many incidents of careless, dangerous or reckless driving are not caused by the excessive consumption of alcohol; in many instances, the offence is more likely to be drug related, as the First Minister indicated. Has the Scottish Executive considered proposals to introduce random roadside testing to detect and apprehend drug-impaired motorists?

**The First Minister:** In recent years, the issue of drug-impaired motorists has become more important. The new provisions that have been introduced to address that issue—not just in legislation, but in the work of our police forces—should make a difference. I understand that there are no current plans to introduce random drug testing on roads in Scotland, but it is important that as well as checking for drink driving our police forces should check for those who may be under the influence of drugs, although alcohol cannot be detected in their system.

### Scottish Enterprise

**6. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Executive's response is to the Auditor General's report "Scottish Enterprise: Special audit examination". (S2F-440)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** Both the Deputy First Minister and I welcome the publication of the report, which we commissioned in March. Where the report raises issues that require action, working with Scottish Enterprise we will ensure that those are properly dealt with.

**Murdo Fraser:** The First Minister's rather complacent reply comes the day after we learned that in 2000 Scottish Enterprise spent £298,000 on rebranding the business shops as the small business gateway and that, earlier this year, it spent another £269,000 on changing the name of the small business gateway to the business gateway. On top of everything else that appears in the Auditor General's report, does that not make it clear that Scottish Enterprise cannot be trusted with a budget of £500 million? Do such examples not prove the case for transferring at least part of Scottish Enterprise's budget out of its hands—clearly, it cannot cope—and using that money to

reduce the burdens on our hard-pressed business community?

**The First Minister:** Listening is important. I said that where action is recommended in the report, that action will be taken. That is not at all complacent—it is perfectly logical and active. However, it is important again to state that, although there are lessons that Scottish Enterprise should learn from the report about its budgeting and some of its decisions, the budget of Scottish Enterprise is dominated by the investment that it makes in Scottish companies, enterprise in Scotland, promoting business in Scotland and training in skills for work. At different times, the Conservatives have proposed reductions in Scottish Enterprise's budget of £100 million, £150 million, £200 million and £250 million. When they do that, they are proposing to cut the budgets for training and skills, support for business and promoting Scotland overseas. If they think that that will help to grow the Scottish economy, they are very wrong.

**Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** The problems at Scottish Enterprise are serious, but they are only part of the picture. The real problems are our low rate of economic growth and the resulting population decline, which look like being this Administration's lasting legacy. What plans does the First Minister have to counter the fact that all the new European Union accession states will have far more power to compete than the Scottish Executive and Scottish Enterprise currently have?

**The First Minister:** That is a typically gloomy response from a person who—like the Tories—supports cuts in Scottish Enterprise's budget. The Scottish nationalist party, like the Tories, wants to cut the budget for training and skills, for promoting enterprise in Scotland and for promoting Scottish business overseas. That is wrong. I do not believe that either the Tories or the nationalists should support that Tory solution.

I intend absolutely that the lasting legacy of this Administration, in which I am First Minister, will not be to reflect back on and gloat over the population decline that has taken place in Scotland over the past two decades—as Mr Mather does regularly—but to do something about it. That is exactly what we will do. When we publish our plans to tackle population decline by ensuring not only that we have a country in which we are proud to live and to which others should be proud to come, but that we go out and promote Scotland not just as a place to visit and with which to do business, but as a place in which to work and live, I hope that the member will support them.

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** Does the First Minister accept that there is absolutely no role that Scottish Enterprise plays that could not

be performed as well and probably much better by Scotland's local authorities in conjunction with Scotland's further education colleges? Does he further accept that, therefore, it would be better to take the £450 million budget from that massive and unaccountable quango and use that public money to improve radically the wage levels of public sector workers in this country, particularly those of striking nursery nurses who are being ignored by this Executive and by Labour-led local authorities across Scotland?

**The First Minister:** Many of the people who voted for Mr Sheridan in May in Glasgow would be disturbed to learn that he believes that we should cut the budget for skills and training in their area and direct that to others elsewhere who are already in work. It is important that Scottish Enterprise works with and helps those who are unemployed and who need skills and training in order to get themselves into work.

It is also important that we have a national agency that is promoting Scottish business overseas and ensuring that business from overseas invests in Scotland. I do not believe that dividing up that responsibility between 32 local authorities would bring one new job to Scotland from overseas investors or would help one Scottish company improve its exports overseas.

Mr Sheridan's analysis is wrong. We need to have the right balance between local action for economic development and a national agency that is promoting Scottish enterprise and delivering jobs.

**Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. During his contribution to First Minister's questions, Mr McLetchie suggested—inadvertently, I hope—that he had been present for the two and a half hours of this morning's debate on public services. Those of us who were present for that debate know that he left the chamber shortly after he made his speech and returned in time only for the winding-up speech of his colleague Mr Monteith. Does the Presiding Officer have powers under the standing orders to overlook Mr McLetchie the next time he wishes to make a contribution? I believe that the Presiding Officer takes such action in relation to back benchers who do not show courtesy to fellow MSPs.

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** That is not a point of order, but I inform the chamber that I drop discreet notes to members in such circumstances.

12:32

*Meeting suspended until 14:30.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Biodiversity Action Plan

##### 1. Shiona Baird (North East Scotland)

**(Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether Scottish Natural Heritage is monitoring the status of species listed as a priority for action under the United Kingdom biodiversity action plan generally or only in sites of special scientific interest. (S2O-936)

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson):** Scottish Natural Heritage is responsible for implementing and monitoring Scotland's contribution to the UK's biodiversity action plan, and is therefore involved in the monitoring of all priority species found in Scotland, irrespective of the type of site on which those species are found.

**Shiona Baird:** Does the minister agree that such monitoring throughout the countryside will be absolutely necessary as part of the implementation of the Scottish biodiversity strategy, not least so that he is able to report to the Parliament on progress, as will be required? Does he further agree that the strategy should identify the priority species and habitats so as to focus that monitoring, and other efforts, on species and habitats of greatest conservation importance? Does he agree that a framework for that approach should be outlined in the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Bill?

**Allan Wilson:** Yes, yes and yes. The member knows that I share her interest and that of her colleagues in those matters. She is probably aware of the publication last week in England of a biodiversity strategy, which drew some media attention. A contract for the analysis of comparable data in Scotland is being let this week. I know of the member's interest in the corn bunting, for example. Progress on such priority species will be made early in the new year. I am happy to give the member the assurances that she seeks in that regard.

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** I am pleased to hear the minister mention the corn bunting. He will understand that, in a constituency such as mine, it is the way in which the crofters and farmers have managed their land that leads to species surviving, or indeed prospering. Will he assure me that the agri-environment funding stream, which underpins those activities, will be looked upon favourably, and that it will be continued in future?

**Allan Wilson:** I am happy to give the member the assurances that he seeks. He and I share many constituency interests in the protection and preservation of species under threat. Obviously, agri-environment support for the preservation of those species is fundamental to their continued survival. We must bring land managers—whether they be crofters, landowners, farmers or whoever—on board if we are to protect and preserve those species.

#### Postwatch Scotland (Meetings)

##### 2. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland)

**(Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met Postwatch Scotland to discuss the impact of its work on communities. (S2O-941)

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson):** The Scottish Executive has had no formal meetings with Postwatch Scotland but Dr Tom Begg, the chairman of Postwatch Scotland, serves on the Communities Scotland advisory board, which is overseeing the operation of the fund to develop post offices in deprived urban areas.

**Alex Johnstone:** Does the minister share the concern expressed by Postwatch Scotland that Post Office Ltd does not seem to have a vision for the optimal future Scottish urban post office network? Does he, like me and local councillor Bruce Mackie, share Postwatch Scotland's view that it remains to be convinced that Barnhill post office in Broughty Ferry is an appropriate target for closure?

**Allan Wilson:** That has not been my experience of Post Office Ltd, either at a constituency or a ministerial level. Post Office Ltd shares the UK Government's approach to providing bigger, better and brighter post offices, not least for the customer base that it serves, many of whom happen to be among the most disadvantaged and deprived people in the country.

Service delivery is what is important, and £230 million of public money has gone into providing better service delivery for that customer base. If there is an issue about the standards or the accountability of the service in Broughty Ferry, that is primarily a matter for the local MP, the Department of Trade and Industry and the UK minister. If there are community issues, I know that my colleague, Margaret Curran, would be happy to discuss them with any MSP.

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Question 3 has been withdrawn.

#### Animal Transport Regulations

**4. George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what the impact of the proposed European Union animal transport

regulations will be on farming and crofting in the Highlands and Islands. (S2O-944)

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson):** [*Interruption.*] Yes, it is me again.

As the proposals are still under negotiation, the impact is uncertain. However, I am well aware of the implications for livestock farmers and my officials in the Council working group are striving for a package that will protect the welfare of animals and safeguard the livestock industry in the Highlands and Islands. I know that that is a concern that George Lyon and I share.

**George Lyon:** The minister will be aware of the recent study carried out by the Scottish Agricultural College, which estimates that, if the current proposals go through, millions of pounds could be lost to businesses in the Highlands and Islands. Does he agree that the real problem is the transnational transport of animals, especially in southern European countries? Given that the United Kingdom has recently updated its own transport regulations to address specific animal welfare concerns, surely the European proposals should concentrate on tightening up and improving regulations on animal transport across the boundaries of each of the countries in Europe.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** Hear, hear!

**Allan Wilson:** I see that Phil Gallie was inspired by George Lyon's words. I agree with George Lyon and Phil Gallie that the problems that have been outlined originate in southern European states. I have read the report to which George Lyon referred and the Scottish Executive shares many of its conclusions. He will be interested to learn—or he may already know—that the Italian presidency has proposed a number of other possibilities, three of which would help to satisfy Scottish interests. Those interests are, of course, opposed by certain other member states in the European Union, so our officials are currently engaged in a process to persuade those other member states of the priority of Scottish interests in that matter, to support the Italian presidency's proposals.

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con):** Does the minister agree that existing European legislation on animal transportation is more than adequate? As has been alluded to, the real problem lies with the policing of existing legislation, particularly on the other side of the channel. Will he therefore undertake to push for an extension in the exemptions for short-haul journeys, in recognition of the fact that few problems relate to journeys within the UK, as the best way forward on the issue?

**Allan Wilson:** I agree with both those points. In fact, the proposals from the Italian presidency cover some of Alex Fergusson's points. We would particularly favour a maximum total journey time of 22 hours, with a short rest of 1 hour in the middle third of that period. I think that that would help to alleviate any prospective problems that the Scottish industry might face from those measures.

**Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Does the minister agree that the real solution to animal welfare problems caused by transportation over long distances, and the best way to reduce haulier costs, would be to provide for more local slaughtering facilities, and thereby to move meat around, rather than live animals? Will he explain what he is doing to encourage more rural abattoirs, particularly in the remoter parts of Scotland?

**Allan Wilson:** I agree in part with Mark Ruskell. There are agricultural support schemes that facilitate that, particularly in the crofting counties and in more remote parts of Scotland. Unfortunately—or fortunately, from an industry perspective—there still has to be live transportation of livestock across Europe, so it is important that we put in place measures to safeguard the health and welfare of animals while they are in transit.

### Central Heating Scheme

**5. Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what projection it has of the number of heating systems to be installed up to the end of this year through the Eaga Partnership scheme. (S2O-921)

**The Minister for Communities (Ms Margaret Curran):** I am sorry to steal Allan Wilson's thunder.

By the end of 2003-04, the Eaga Partnership will have installed more than 21,000 central heating systems in the private sector.

**Mr Welsh:** This week, I have seen at first hand the excellent work that is done by Energy Action Scotland and the Eaga Partnership. I encourage the minister to maximise the support for those organisations. Will she guarantee that the welcome over-80s scheme, to be introduced next year, will in no way reduce or detract from the available budgets for existing energy action schemes?

**Ms Curran:** I am happy to give Andrew Welsh the assurance that he seeks. We support the important work of Energy Action Scotland; it has made a significant contribution to tackling fuel poverty in Scotland and we want to continue to work with it. The work of the Eaga Partnership is also important in tackling fuel poverty through delivering the scheme. During the recent debate, I



made a commitment to raise members' issues with Eaga and we will continue to do so. I will also raise the points that Andrew Welsh made this afternoon.

The extension of the central heating programme to the over-80s is a significant development, but that development should not undermine existing programmes. The central heating programme has been very successful and we will ensure that that success continues.

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Is the minister aware that in remote areas the Eaga Partnership will install central heating systems only when it can do so in a certain number of homes at the same time? That problem was raised with me during warm homes week. As that policy causes long delays in remote areas and islands, will she, as a matter of urgency, consider what can be done to speed up the delivery of central heating systems?

**Ms Curran:** I am happy to pursue that matter on Maureen Macmillan's behalf. During the recent debate, I assured members that I would pursue a number of issues that were raised about the Eaga Partnership. I will speak to Maureen Macmillan about the matter.

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** Does the minister share my concern that Scottish Gas has inappropriately sold central heating systems to older people in my community who would have qualified for grants? Will she consider how the central heating programme can be promoted, not just to the people in the community who will benefit from it, but to health visitors and other professionals who work with older people?

**Ms Curran:** Great effort has been put into ensuring that the scheme has been appropriately promoted and that people—in particular elderly people who often do not have access to information through the traditional means—have proper information about the central heating programme. We take every opportunity to maximise the promotion of the scheme.

I would be very concerned if other schemes were being inappropriately promoted to elderly people. I believe that all the key agencies are aware of the central heating programme and they should not attempt to undermine it in any way; I will pursue that.

**George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD):** The minister is aware of concerns that I have raised in the past and, indeed, she has taken action to improve the delivery of the central heating programme in my constituency. However, one big problem is that there are only two contractors to deliver the programme for the whole of Argyll and Bute, which is a big area. One contractor has a record of very poor workmanship and has failed properly to install new central heating systems.

Will she look closely at what is happening in my constituency and consider how the problem might be addressed? Will she deal with the matter, which is causing great distress to a number of my constituents?

**Ms Curran:** George Lyon has raised issues with me about practices in that part of the world, as he said, and I have pursued the matter to some satisfaction. I believe that we have achieved a significant improvement.

Poor workmanship is unacceptable in Scotland in any service at any time and we should take appropriate action to ensure that we tackle the problem. When sums of public money have been committed and the resources put in place to deliver a service, we expect high standards of delivery. I give George Lyon a commitment that I am more than happy to pursue the matter.

#### **Draft Nuclear Sites and Radioactive Substances Bill**

**6. Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has responded to the consultation exercise by the Department of Trade and Industry on the draft Nuclear Sites and Radioactive Substances Bill and whether copies of any response will be placed in the Scottish Parliament information centre. (S2O-934)

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson):** It was not necessary for the Scottish Executive formally to respond to that consultation exercise. In accordance with the memorandum of understanding, we are in regular contact with the United Kingdom Government on a wide range of issues, which include the matters of mutual interest that were the subject of the consultation to which the member referred. The relevant provisions have now been incorporated into the Energy Bill that was announced in the Queen's Speech.

**Mark Ballard:** As the minister said, the Energy Bill is currently being debated in the House of Lords; I think that it is getting its second reading today. The bill contains the provisions that were laid out in the draft Nuclear Sites and Radioactive Substances Bill to set up a nuclear decommissioning authority. A number of provisions in the Energy Bill cover functions devolved to the Parliament and there is significant concern, particularly about the lack of overriding environmental objectives for the new authority. What plans does the Executive have for on-going consultation with the Parliament on those issues, both now and as the nuclear decommissioning authority produces its draft strategies and action plans?

**Allan Wilson:** This question is probably a good advertisement for themed questioning, which I

know is proposed in certain quarters, because we could debate the Energy Bill's contents for a long time. As the member said, the Energy Bill is wide-ranging and complex and contains proposals relating to the nuclear industry as well as provisions to allow us to expand consent for offshore energy, and on Britain-wide electricity trading arrangements. Given that it is so complex, my colleague Lewis Macdonald has written to the conveners of the relevant committees apologising for our failure to lodge a Sewel motion to allow us to consider some of these matters in the Parliament. It would be inappropriate for me to add to that before the committees have had a chance to consider the matter.

**Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP):** Does the minister agree that the consultation process underlines the fact that the clean-up required after a nuclear installation has served its time is so complex and costly that further nuclear power stations should be ruled out for the foreseeable future?

**Allan Wilson:** No. The UK Government and the Scottish Executive are concerned about the lack of progress from the nuclear industry on decommissioning and the clean-up of sites, to which the member referred. We are determined to get to grips with the nuclear legacy to ensure that clean-ups are carried out safely, securely, cost-effectively and in such a way that protects the environment, for the benefit of current and future generations. That should not preclude our consideration of any industry proposal for any new build.

### Single Transferable Vote

**7. Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what study it has made of the use of the single transferable vote in the recent Northern Ireland Assembly elections and what lessons can be learned for future Scottish elections. (S20-945)

**The Deputy Minister for Parliamentary Business (Tavish Scott):** We have established an independent working group to consider the implementation of the single transferable vote in Scotland. That group is considering the experience of STV in other countries, including Northern Ireland.

**Phil Gallie:** I welcome the study in Northern Ireland. Is the minister aware of the huge number of spoiled ballots recorded in the Northern Ireland election? Does he recognise the confusion that seems to exist among the electorate, given the fact that the system has been used in the past? Will he take that on board and does he acknowledge the dissatisfaction registered in Northern Ireland? Does he agree that simplicity in electoral reform is the key?

**Tavish Scott:** Although I agree with Mr Gallie, there is a lot of simplicity about making a direct correlation between Northern Ireland politics and Scottish politics. It is important to reflect on why STV was introduced in Northern Ireland: the political situation there is different and the desire is to reflect the balance of the community in any outcome. Mr Gallie might also be aware that the turnout in Northern Ireland was 63 per cent, which was higher than the turnout in the Scottish elections in May. That shows more interest—perhaps worryingly—in the Northern Irish elections that have just taken place. The STV working group will consider these matters; that is why ministers have established it. Perhaps Mr Gallie will reflect on the fact that he is here because of proportional representation and if he wishes to be a convert to that cause we will welcome him.

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** Does the minister agree that it is vital that elections are conducted in a way that reduces voter confusion to a minimum? Does he agree with the unanimous view of the Society for Returning Officers in Scotland that if STV is introduced for local government elections, Scottish Parliament and council elections should not be held on the same day?

**Tavish Scott:** I understand the member's point and the points that have been made in evidence to the Local Government and Transport Committee in recent weeks. Ministers are aware of the issues but, at this moment, we have no plans to change the proposals to have the elections on the same day.

**Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab):** I am sure that the minister is aware that the chair of the STV working group advised the Local Government and Transport Committee this week that he did not expect to provide his final report to ministers until September next year. Does the minister share my concern that that could mean that final consideration of the bill could take place before members of this Parliament are able to see a copy of that report?

**Tavish Scott:** Mr Muldoon raises an important point. I advise the chamber that the STV working group has been asked to report to ministers on issues relating to the practical implementation of STV by—as Mr Muldoon says—September next year. However, the group's chairman, David Green, will make an interim report to ministers in January, before ministers give evidence to Mr Muldoon's committee later in the year. That will be done to deal with the very point that Mr Muldoon raises.

**Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD):** Does the minister agree that evidence from Northern Ireland shows that the number of spoiled votes varies greatly from election to election? The use of STV

is not the sole reason for people spoiling their ballot papers. Will he agree to examine fully next year's local elections in southern Ireland, which are being conducted using STV and electronic voting?

**Tavish Scott:** Mr Smith makes important points about electronic voting and about considering the experience of other countries. That is why we have the STV working group, which is considering and taking advice on these matters. Executive officials working on local government issues are considering these matters closely and will be studying practical examples so as to inform our considerations.

### Transport Links (Ayrshire)

**8. Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made in improving transport links in Ayrshire. (S2O-923)

**The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen):** I visited Ayrshire on Monday and announced that we would be starting the major upgrade of the Whitlets roundabout in Ayr next autumn and proceeding with a study into a bypass for Maybole. That comes on top of a series of major investments that will benefit Ayrshire significantly—such as the M77 project and the three-towns bypass. Those investments will total well over £100 million.

**Irene Oldfather:** I very much welcome the progress to date. Does the minister agree that improving transport infrastructure is crucial to encouraging economic development, especially in Ayrshire? Does he accept that upgrading the A737 through Kilwinning and my colleague Allan Wilson's constituency in Dalry would sensibly complement the work that is already being done on the three-towns bypass, thus better connecting the north of Ayrshire to Glasgow airport and providing further tourism and employment opportunities for the people of Ayrshire?

**Nicol Stephen:** I agree. We have current commitments in relation to the A737. It is estimated that the Roadhead roundabout will cost £1.2 million, and the Head Street junction improvement scheme on the Beith bypass is programmed for the current financial year, with an estimated cost of £600,000. That will involve the construction of a roundabout. We are making commitments to the area and I am aware of other campaigns—for example, for a Dalry bypass.

I would like other investments to be made in Irene Oldfather's constituency over the coming years, but we have made a significant start. Investment is at a level that has not been seen in Ayrshire for many years. I believe that it will have a major impact on the communities and economy of Ayrshire, which impact is badly needed.

### Shop Workers (Christmas Day Working)

**9. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what representations it will make to Her Majesty's Government on the impact of shop workers being required to work on Christmas day. (S2O-911)

**The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):** The Executive has discussed with the UK Government representations from the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers on this issue. Whereas employment matters are reserved to the UK Government, policy on shop trading hours in Scotland is devolved. I am aware that the member has intimated her intention to introduce a bill to prevent large stores from trading on Christmas day and new year's day.

**Karen Whitefield:** Does the minister agree that Scotland's hard-working retail staff serve our needs 363 days of the year and should be able to look forward to celebrating Christmas and new year's day with their friends and family? Is she aware of the growing support for my proposed bill from members of the public, trade unions and—most important—Scotland's most widely read newspaper, the *Daily Record*?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I am certainly aware of the importance of work-life balance. I am aware that the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers has said that it is concerned that employees of large stores in Scotland might be required to work on Christmas day and new year's day and about the impact of that on family life. Further, I am aware of the views of the Scottish Retail Consortium, which advises that its members do not open on Christmas day and have no plans to do so.

We will consider the matter in greater detail. Consultation will be an important part of that.

### Teachers' Pay and Conditions

**10. Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what stage the implementation of the McCrone agreement on teachers' pay and conditions has reached and whether it envisages any difficulties arising. (S2O-943)

**The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock):** The implementation of the agreement is on track and I expect it to remain so.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Perhaps we can have regular and more full explanations at a later date. The minister will be aware that the McCrone agreement includes options for a retirement wind-down for teachers. Does he agree that implementation of the pension provisions in the Westminster green paper that could forcibly increase teachers' pension ages from 60 to 65 could undermine the hard work of all those who

ensured that the McCrone agreement was established and implemented? Does he also agree that that is a matter of serious concern and that we must protect the McCrone agreement from being interfered with by the pension provisions in the green paper?

**Peter Peacock:** As I am sure Fiona Hyslop knows, there is a long way to go on the questions that are being raised elsewhere about pension arrangements. No decisions have been made in that regard, but the green paper forms part of the consideration in a Scottish and a UK context of how to move forward. It would be unfortunate if we raised unnecessary anxieties about that at this stage.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** Is the minister aware that the Headteachers Association of Scotland, which expressed concerns about the progress of the McCrone agreement, has recently withdrawn from the teachers' panel of the Scottish negotiating committee for teachers because it thought that it was being marginalised? Can he confirm that the SNCT will take into account the views of all groups that will be affected by the McCrone agreement on a fair and objective basis?

**Peter Peacock:** I have noted the decision of the Headteachers Association of Scotland and of the Association of Head Teachers in Scotland, which has also recently withdrawn from the SNCT. Although I personally regret those decisions, they have been taken freely by those organisations. We want head teachers to be part of the consideration of teachers' pay, the management of schools and the associated negotiations. We have pledged to try to bring that about, in partnership with the other members of the SNCT.

#### **Corporate Culpable Homicide**

**11. Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to introduce a change to the law in relation to corporate culpable homicide. (S2O-938)

**The Minister for Justice (Cathy Jamieson):** We have only recently received the appeal judgment in the Transco case and the Lord Advocate and I will need to study it in detail before reaching any decision on whether new legislation is required.

**Karen Gillon:** In the written determination that was issued last week in the case of Transco v the Lord Advocate, the court clearly states that, although penalties exist in health and safety legislation, if this Parliament and the courts are to be able to prosecute for corporate culpable homicide, we will have to legislate.

Given the strong feelings in my constituency following the deaths of the Findlay family, will the

minister agree to meet me to discuss how best we can take forward the determination and the changes that are required as a result of it?

**Cathy Jamieson:** I assure the member that I will meet her. Members will recall that, on a number of occasions in this chamber, I have indicated that, if the law needs to be changed, we will change it.

It is important to remember that proceedings against Transco are still live. The original indictment contained an alternative charge under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, which carries the same financial penalty as culpable homicide. We should remember that when discussing this case.

#### **M74 Extension (Public Inquiry)**

**12. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive what the total cost of the public inquiry into the M74 extension will be. (S2O-937)

**The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen):** The total cost of the public inquiry into the M74 completion will depend on the length and complexity of the inquiry and will not be known until the inquiry is completed.

**Patrick Harvie:** I am sure that the cost will be significant to the people of Scotland. Does the minister agree that, if the inquiry is to represent value for money, it must be a fair and impartial hearing? Will he assure me that, contrary to the First Minister's statement in the Parliament last week, the Executive has not yet committed itself to building Europe's biggest urban motorway project, and that, if the inquiry recommends against it, it will not be built?

**Nicol Stephen:** The final decision rests with the Scottish ministers, and we will take into consideration all the evidence that is submitted to the inquiry. Patrick Harvie is correct that that is the purpose of the inquiry. In due course, we will receive from the inquiry a balanced report and it will then be for me, as Minister for Transport, along with my ministerial colleagues, to decide how to proceed. However, we have made it clear that the project would bring significant benefits to Glasgow and to west-central Scotland in general, and that remains the Executive's position.

#### **Maternity Care**

**13. Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP):** To ask the Scottish Executive how it will ensure that women from the most deprived sections of society have improved access to specialist maternity care. (S2O-955)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm):** One of the key themes of

both "A Framework for maternity services in Scotland" and the subsequent report of the expert group on acute maternity services—EGAMS—is that maternity services should be community based as far as possible and targeted to address specific needs, including those of women from the most deprived sections of society. Implementation by national health service boards will be monitored through a performance assessment framework for maternity services that is currently being developed.

**Carolyn Leckie:** I thank the minister for that predictable answer, but will he tell me how poorer women, who are more likely to need, for example, detailed ultrasound scanning and Doppler ultrasound, will have greater access if they have to travel further at an emotionally stressful time without any help for relatives to travel with them, as only routine scanning will be available locally? Further to that, does he consider that an unplanned delivery in the back of an ambulance is the sort of access that is acceptable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** The matter is a subject of great debate throughout Scotland, and the principle that I mentioned in my original answer remains true: as some of the services become more specialist and concentrated in specialist centres, other services will be delivered more routinely in the community. Therefore, there is a two-way movement, which is true of many service reorganisations.

At the end of the day, the key issues for women are, I am sure, clinical safety and the quality of care, and all the evidence, especially on specialist treatments for maternity services, is that those will be delivered more safely and more effectively in specialist centres where there are consultants who deal with a reasonably large number of women each year. I know that the debate is controversial and difficult, but people will understand that, as long as as much care as possible is delivered in local communities—and community-led midwife units are being created in some local communities—the specialist services are sometimes better delivered in larger concentrations.

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** I am glad to hear the minister mention specialist services. He will be aware of the inaccurate brochure that Greater Glasgow NHS Board has sent out regarding the maternity services review in Glasgow, which claims that a 1999 report by the British Association of Paediatric Surgeons says that it is safe to transport seriously ill new-born babies, when, in fact that report opposes the transport of neo-natals. Will the minister act now and instruct Greater Glasgow NHS Board to withdraw that damaging and inaccurate leaflet and

will he instigate an immediate inquiry into the process of the consultation?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** There are clearly major issues about neo-natal transport around the review, although there is a pan-Scotland neo-natal intensive-care transport service. I believe that Sandra White is referring to two leaflets, and it appears that she cited one rather than the other. All the details of the evidence are of great interest to me, and I want to be fully aware of both pieces of evidence—I am sure that people in Glasgow will equally want to be aware of them. However, as Sandra White is referring to two leaflets and the argument is complex, it is not for me to give an immediate, specific ruling on that question. I am sure—

**Ms White** *rose*—

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I am sure that Sandra White will raise the issue with Greater Glasgow NHS Board in the appropriate way.

#### **Renfrewshire Schools (Public-private Partnership Project)**

**14. Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what provisions have been made for public scrutiny of the public-private partnership schools project in Renfrewshire. (S2O-951)

**The Minister for Education and Young People (Peter Peacock):** One of the conditions for the funding by the Scottish Executive of schools public-private partnership projects is that the final business case be made publicly available, having due regard to issues of commercial confidentiality.

**Frances Curran:** I ask the minister—and I do wonder myself—how it is possible to square the circle in making a commitment to local democracy but then decide to run major public services through secret contracts. Is he in the least bit concerned that the workers who have just been sold to private companies, and whose jobs and pensions will be affected, do not even have access to the bill of sale?

**Peter Peacock:** One—and only one—of the flaws of the Scottish Socialist Party's analysis of public-private partnerships is that its members somehow pretend that it is only through PPPs that the private sector has become involved in delivering public services. Who built all our roads, all our hospitals, all our schools and all our other public buildings during the last century? It was the private sector—and the private sector made vast profits in so doing. The difference between those days and these days is that, today, the private sector is required to take a share of the risk of delivering those projects. If they are not delivered

adequately, the private sector must make good the difference. In the past, the public sector did that. That is part of the reason why we are driving forward with public-private partnerships and why we are delivering more than £140 million of new investment in schools in Renfrewshire. That ought to be welcomed, not condemned.

**Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP):** Is the minister aware that elected members on Renfrewshire Council are allowed to gain sight of PPP documents only if they first sign a confidentiality agreement, which covers

“all information of whatever nature (including commercial and Personal Data) and in whatever form (written, oral, visual or electronic and including all copies) relating to the Council and ANY of its services”,

and that, under paragraph 7 of that agreement, the obligations on the signatory

“shall be continuing and, in particular, shall survive the evaluation of competing bids, and contract completion”?

Will the minister explain how such arrangements help to achieve transparency or improve accountability in local authorities?

**Peter Peacock:** Local authorities must follow due process and the public rules that apply to their contracts, and Renfrewshire Council must satisfy itself that it has done so under its own terms and rules. If he seeks more information, I suggest that the member writes to the council, which will be bound by the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 in the same way as is any other public body in Scotland.

Frankly, what we have heard from the SNP is just a distraction. It is simply opposed to the delivery of the new resources that we want to have in place in the area's schools, and its members will find any excuse to undermine that.

#### Area Tourist Boards

**15. Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive when it expects to publish its review of area tourist boards. (S2O-927)

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Jim Wallace.

**The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mr Frank McAveety):** Thank you for the elevation, Presiding Officer.

Since the summer, a group of ministers has been examining the needs of Scottish tourism and the public expenditure that is devoted to it. We are considering the outcome of the area tourist board review in the context of the wider issues, and we hope that the group's conclusions will be announced soon.

**Alasdair Morgan:** I thank the minister for that fairly predictable answer. He will remember that, in February, his predecessor stated in the chamber:

“an announcement will be made as soon as possible after the new Parliament has convened.”—[*Official Report*, 13 February 2003; c 18176.]

Six months later, the chair of the Scottish Tourism Forum said:

“We need decisions on area tourist boards ... no-one can get on with the job in hand with continuing uncertainty.”

Does not Scotland's premier industry deserve more haste and expedition from the Executive?

**Mr McAveety:** For the first time, a group of Cabinet ministers is considering Scottish tourism across the whole area of policy in Scotland. We want to connect the area tourist board review to a broader strategy, which deals with the existing level of resources, addresses how we can improve both public sector and private sector contributions to those resources, and explores ways in which to raise levels of skills and training.

I agree with Alasdair Morgan that we have an opportunity to continue to grow Scottish tourism. We have had a very good year and we want to ensure that the sector develops fully. The key discussions that ministers are having are intended to ensure that that development takes place. We want to get that right, and I would rather spend time on getting it right and accurate. I said in my initial response—for those who were not listening earlier—that we would respond soon.

#### Debt Recovery (Bank Arrestment)

**16. Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has for the reform of bank arrestment as a means of recovering debt. (S2O-933)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace):** We will bring forward proposals for reform of the law of diligence, including proposals for the arrestment of funds in bank and other accounts, in draft legislation that is to be consulted on in this parliamentary year.

**Eleanor Scott:** We are very close to Christmas and the minister must be aware of local authorities' practice of increasing their use of bank arrestments in the week before Christmas, in the knowledge that many people will have been paid Christmas bonuses or will have received their January pay early. According to citizens advice bureaux, that practice occurs every year, and bureaux throughout Scotland experience a rise in the number of people who need advice because their bank account has been frozen, which leaves families distraught and penniless immediately before Christmas. Given the severe impact that the practice has on people, and its frequently untimely use, does he agree that reform is needed urgently? Will he assure us that such reform will proceed without delay and will be fully consulted

on?

**Mr Wallace:** I do not concede that the picture that Eleanor Scott has painted is accurate. However, we consulted on the arrestment of funds in the bank accounts of vulnerable people and the potential that exists for the arrestment of earnings when we held our consultation on a range of issues relating to personal diligence. We intend to introduce legislation and, as my colleague Hugh Henry, the Deputy Minister for Justice, confirmed earlier this year, we want to reform diligence law to produce a solution that protects from arrestment subsistence levels of money. That is our objective. The consultation in which we engaged produced a variety of opinions on how that might be done. We are engaged in further consultation with stakeholders and we hope that we will be able to unveil positive proposals on dealing with the problem when we publish our draft legislation.

## **Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill: Preliminary Stage**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-711, in the name of Bill Butler, on the general principles of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill. I call Bill Butler, on behalf of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee, to speak to and move the motion.

15:12

**Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** Before I talk about the committee's preliminary stage report, it might be helpful if I were to set out the background to the bill and the work of the committee.

The Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill is the third private bill to be introduced in the Parliament, but it is the first bill relating to transport and works. The promoter of the bill is Clackmannanshire Council, which seeks the necessary statutory powers to reopen the railway that runs between Stirling and Kincardine via Alloa. The promoter intends to use the route from Stirling to Alloa to operate freight and passenger trains, while it is intended that the line from Alloa to Kincardine will operate only as a freight line.

The promoter has cited three main objectives for the scheme. First, it wants it to improve public transport access from Alloa, especially to Stirling, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Secondly, it wants it to provide an alternative, shorter and more efficient route for coal traffic from Hunterston and opencast mines in Ayrshire to Longannet power station in Fife, which will reduce congestion on both the road and rail networks. Thirdly, it wants it to remove coal trains from the Forth bridge, thereby providing scope for improving the reliability of existing passenger services between Fife and Edinburgh and for increasing the number of such services.

The bill does not seek to give permission for the promoter to operate the railway and its facilities, for which a licence would be required under section 8 of the Railways Act 1993. The bill seeks to provide the promoter with the power to acquire by compulsory purchase land and rights in land.

The bill was introduced in the Parliament on 15 May 2003 and, at the conclusion of the 60-day objection period to which all private bills are subject, 55 admissible objections had been lodged, of which 52 remain. I shall refer to objections later in my speech.

Perhaps I could remind members of the procedures to which the bill has been subject during the preliminary stage, which is the first stage to which a private bill is subject. The committee has three functions at the preliminary stage. First, it has to consider and report on the general principles of the bill. Secondly, it has to consider and report on whether the bill should proceed as a private bill by deciding whether the purpose of the bill is to obtain for the promoter particular powers or benefits that are in excess of, or in conflict with, the general law. The committee has to ask whether the accompanying documents satisfy the technical criteria that are set down in standing orders and whether they are adequate to allow proper scrutiny of the bill. Thirdly, the committee has to give preliminary consideration to the objections and reject any objection where the objector's interests are not, in the committee's opinion, clearly adversely affected by the bill.

To use the words of the Minister for Transport, the committee's approach must be "fair, cautious and objective".

With that in mind, it is fair to say that the onus at the preliminary stage was on the promoter to convince the committee of the merits of the bill. As such, it was desirable for the committee to take evidence from the promoter and other witnesses on a number of topics to enable us to report to the Parliament. Those topics included the scope of the bill, the need for the railway and its associated works, alternatives such as non-rail and alternative rail routes, consultation and compensation, funding, and the environmental statement.

The committee took evidence on those six broad themes during three evidence-gathering meetings in Alloa town hall. That was the first time that a committee of the Parliament had been to Alloa; it was appropriate that we held the meetings in the area that is most directly affected by the bill, as that allowed people from the local community to attend the meetings. All committee members undertook a site visit to familiarise themselves with the general layout of the route and that was helpful in broadening our understanding of the issues surrounding the project.

For the remainder of my speech, I will speak to the report and the key issues that are identified, and recommendations that are made, within it. The committee was mindful that none of the objections to the bill related to the principle of the bill. Nonetheless, it was incumbent on the committee to ask itself whether it considered the reopening of the railway line between Stirling, Alloa and Kincardine to be a sensible policy to pursue, taking into account factors relating to the environment, economic development and social policy, and the level of public expenditure that would be involved.

The project has been costed at £37 million, with £30 million coming from the Scottish Executive. The promoter carried out a line reopening benefit study that estimated 30-year direct and indirect benefits of around £35 million and £22 million respectively. The promoter indicated that its economic model pointed to a net present value of between £15 million and £19 million.

In analysing the economic benefits, it was clear to us that two major issues stood out, the first of which was the lifespan of Longannet power station and how long there would be a need to transport coal. Secondly, was there a reasonable prospect that there would be a shift in how coal was transported to the power station, that is, away from the existing route over the Forth bridge to the proposed route?

It quickly became apparent to the committee that the 30-year benefits were not going to accrue in relation to how coal is transported to Longannet. That is because the current information is that Longannet is highly unlikely to be open beyond 2016. Given that the earliest that the railway line could open would be 2006, we are talking, at best, about a 10-year benefit in relation to that objective. Indeed, it is possible that the power station might stay open only until 2012. That scenario would put the direct and indirect benefits at approximately £20 million and £3 million respectively, which is down 41 per cent and 86 per cent respectively on the 30-year model. The net present value would then be between -£14 million and -£15 million.

That leads to the second big issue: will Scottish Power use the new route to enable the existing freight pathway over the Forth bridge to be surrendered for, say, an additional passenger service to Fife? Scottish Power highlighted the strong economic imperative in it using the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine line, which offered some reassurance to the committee.

Further reassurance was provided in the evidence from English Welsh & Scottish Railway Ltd, the company that transports the coal to Longannet. It indicated that, should it have no commercial need for track access rights over the Forth bridge for freight traffic—and it does not anticipate that it will—under the terms of its track access agreement it would surrender those rights back to Network Rail. Those rights would then be available to the Scottish Executive to pursue its objectives in relation to increasing and improving passenger rail services to and from Fife and Edinburgh.

The committee considered that there was good reason to believe that direct economic benefits—albeit significantly reduced—could be realised if the scheme were to progress, but recognised that the promoter was keen to stress that beyond those direct economic benefits, there are other reasons



why the bill is desirable in public policy terms. I am sure that colleagues from Fife may wish to comment on the effect that the scheme could have on rail services to the kingdom. Other colleagues may wish to pick up on the environmental benefits that would accrue from getting freight on lorries off the road and on to rail. I will comment briefly on the benefits that were suggested in relation to the economic development of Clackmannanshire.

There is a perceived lack of suitable transport links and connectivity in the Clackmannanshire area, which has hindered economic opportunity and performance. Officials from Scottish Enterprise and the local council were quite blunt in describing Clackmannanshire's poor-relation status—certainly in comparison with the Stirling Council area. Of course, all members will recognise the likelihood of improved transport infrastructure leading to enhanced economic development prospects, but the committee had a duty to see whether there was any more tangible evidence that the railway would provide the stimulus for economic regeneration.

On a confidential basis, Scottish Enterprise provided details of a number of companies that are considering whether to expand or provide new investment in the area. The committee was satisfied that there is a sound basis to believe that the prospect of a reopened railway is a material factor in the decision-making process on whether a business should expand its operation or provide new investment in the area. Furthermore, the indication is that businesses are alert to using the rail line not just as a passenger line, but as a freight line. That is particularly encouraging, given the shortened lifespan of Longannet.

While the decision to pass the bill is a matter for the Parliament, the question whether the funding is in place to allow the project to be built is largely a matter for the Minister for Transport. As I said, the Executive has committed £30 million to the project if the Parliament passes the bill. The committee's main concern was whether the likely truncated lifespan of Longannet power station had changed the minister's mind about the worth of putting public funds into the project. The minister said no; he still believed that there was a solid business case for the project.

On the basis of evidence that was put to us by the promoter, the committee believed that, in public policy terms, the reopening of the line would produce considerable transport, socioeconomic and environmental benefits on local, regional and national scales. The promoter provided sufficient evidence for the committee to have confidence that those benefits were real and attainable. The committee believes, therefore, that the Parliament should approve the general principles of the bill.

The second of the committee's three functions was to consider and report on whether the bill

should proceed as a private bill. I am mindful that I am relatively short for time and that this material is fairly technical in nature, so I refer members to paragraphs 70 to 130 of the committee's report, which make good reading.

The committee was satisfied that the purpose of the bill is to obtain for the promoter particular powers or benefits that are in excess of, or in conflict with, the general law. The committee was also content, on the whole, with the adequacy of the accompanying documents to allow for proper scrutiny of the bill. In transport and works bills, environmental statements—which, in effect, are environmental impact assessments—are pivotal documents. In the case of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill, the environmental statement is a long document, running as it does to three volumes and—thankfully—a non-technical summary. However daunting the task may have appeared, it was nonetheless important that the committee satisfied itself that the information in the document was adequate and that the statement displayed a consistent and common approach throughout, so that the committee could conduct an informed and detailed debate at the consideration stage.

I will pick out a few highlights from the environmental statement. The chapter that dealt with noise and vibration caused concerns. Noise and vibration were the most commonly cited factors in objections to the bill, so the committee wanted to satisfy itself that that chapter was adequate. We commissioned a peer review of the chapter from Arup, which made several recommendations for the promoter to act on. The recommendations were that the promoter should prepare an inventory of potential noise and vibration sources, sensitive receptors and impacts; commit to and draft a code of construction practice; review and revise the assessment methodologies for operational train noise and vibration; check the frequency weighting functions and calibration of the equipment that was used for train vibration measurements; prepare operational noise and vibration impact plans; and tailor operational noise and vibration mitigation to address the impacts so identified. The promoter has responded to those recommendations.

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Does the member agree that although the current legislative procedure is reasonable, something of an anomaly arises in economic planning? If all the coal, or extra coal, were moved on existing railway lines or by lorries on existing roads, nobody would be able to say a dicky-bird about it and the movement could go ahead almost immediately. However, somebody who wants to reconstruct a railway line must jump through many hoops to create what might well be an environmental benefit.

**Bill Butler:** That might be an anomaly, but we must follow the procedure in the law, and I do not think that the member would say that we should do otherwise.

I will refer to one other matter that stems from the environmental statement. Scottish Natural Heritage expressed concerns about the ecological impact of the works that are proposed in the bill on the River Teith, which is a candidate site for special area of conservation status, and, in particular, on the river, brook and sea lamprey that are present in the river, along with Atlantic salmon.

An appropriate assessment under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c) Regulations 1994 is required to gauge the impact on the River Teith of the development works that the bill proposes. Before members suggest that I and the other committee members should roll up our trouser legs and go to the river with our jamjars, I inform them that SNH has advised us that it is content that the proposed works will not adversely affect the integrity of the River Teith candidate site. The decision will be a matter for the Parliament, but the procedure is that such an assessment should take place at the final stage of the bill, immediately before the Parliament decides whether to pass the bill.

The committee conducted a preliminary consideration of objections. On balance, we agreed that the interests of those who made the two objections that we examined would be adversely affected, so if the Parliament agrees to the motion today, those objections will go forward to the consideration stage.

Some press coverage of the committee's report went along the lines of saying that it was full steam ahead for the railway. I make it clear that the situation is not so. Should the Parliament agree that the bill should proceed to the consideration stage, the committee will still have considerable work to do to hear the case of the promoter and objectors on the linear route and how the proposed route may affect individual householders and businesses.

With that cautionary note, I will move motion S2M-711, which is in my name, on behalf of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill and that the Bill should proceed as a Private Bill.

15:29

**The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen):** The Scottish Parliament was established back in

1999 and has existed for only four and a half years. In that time, many historic occasions and firsts have happened, and today brings another important first. For the first time, the Parliament is considering the delivery of a major new rail project. That is an exciting prospect for all members in the chamber, for Clackmannanshire and for the whole of Scotland. For the first time, we have the chance to decide in Scotland whether a new railway should be built here.

As we heard from Bill Butler, the committee convener, the committee met three times in Alloa. It was the first time that a parliamentary committee had met in Clackmannanshire. Local people were able to attend and to hear the evidence for themselves.

Bill Butler and his committee—Rob Gibson, Nora Radcliffe, David Mundell and Richard Baker—have led the way in hearing the evidence on the principles of the bill and in making the recommendation to the Parliament today. We should thank them for the excellent work that they have done to date. I am very pleased that they have recommended that the bill should proceed to its consideration stage. The railway can bring significant benefits to the people of Alloa, to the local economy, to the wider Scottish rail network and to our efforts to promote public transport and the greater use of passenger rail and rail freight.

The Executive has made a clear commitment to expanding the rail network and to completing the vital missing links in Scotland's transport infrastructure, particularly its public transport infrastructure. It has also made a clear commitment to improving accessibility and integration. Reopening the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine rail link meets all those objectives, which is why I stand to support the bill today.

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** All members recognise the positive remarks that the minister has made and welcome the bill that is before us today. Does he have in mind any other proposals, for either the reopening of disused freight lines or the construction of new lines? I hope that the Executive will promote positively other such reopenings and openings.

**Nicol Stephen:** Opportunities will arise from the proposal that is before the chamber today to expand the network in the Clackmannanshire area still further. There are opportunities to create linkages through to the port of Rosyth. Most of the proposals that we are developing—there are a significant number—involve passenger and freight traffic and, wherever possible, we should allow both options.

We are mindful of the need to encourage a shift from road to either rail or sea traffic—we also need to make use of our water routes and linkages. In

the Clackmannanshire context, the port of Rosyth is very important. There are real opportunities to create new routes into the Baltic, to Scandinavia and to other parts of Europe. We also have the opportunity to create linkages across Scotland: to Hunterston, to other parts of Ayrshire and to Stranraer, with the linkages that they offer to Ireland. There is an exciting prospect in front of us, if only we seize the opportunity. I am certainly committed to doing as Tommy Sheridan suggests, which is to make the most of those opportunities.

The committee heard clear evidence from Clackmannanshire Council and Scottish Enterprise Forth Valley about the need for the railway to end Clackmannanshire's economic isolation. A compelling case was made that the local economy would perform significantly better if its strategic accessibility were improved. Major new opportunities would be created.

Shorter journey times, especially to Glasgow, and the reconnection of Alloa to the rail network will help to make Clackmannanshire a better, more accessible place not only in which to live, but in which to work. I believe that that will attract new and significant private sector investment to the area. The improved public transport links will make it easier for the people of Alloa to access jobs, education, training and other opportunities and give them the chance to take part in a range of economic and educational activities that people in many other better-connected towns take for granted.

The scheme will bring wider benefits to the passenger network in other parts of Scotland. It will remove freight trains from some of the most congested parts of Scotland's rail network, including the Forth bridge and the Edinburgh to Glasgow line. That will improve the reliability of passenger services on those routes and clear the way for additional services between Fife and Edinburgh. In turn, that will reduce pressure on the Forth road bridge.

By providing a shorter, quicker route for coal freight from Hunterston to Longannet power station, the route will offer significant freight benefits.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have one minute, minister.

**Nicol Stephen:** I thought that I had seven minutes in total.

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife Con):** We have heard, in essence, a positive case being made for the scheme. In the time that the minister has remaining to him, perhaps he will clarify two points. What are his concerns about the size of the contingency costs in the budget? The costs amount to some £9.9 million out of a £37 million spend, which, at first glance, seems to be a

rather large proportion. Is that enough or is it too much? Does he have anything to say about the objectors' views on their loss of amenity and their concerns about safety?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have one minute this time, minister.

**Nicol Stephen:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Objectors' views should be taken seriously and the process that we are going through provides the opportunity—provided that we move forward today—for those views to be listened to. That should be done fairly and appropriately; I have great confidence that the committee will do exactly that.

As we move forward in a project such as this, the expectation is that we get tighter and more accurate all the time in relation to the costs. Members know the problems that we have got into by underestimating the costs of significant public sector projects in Scotland, particularly in the light of my earlier remarks about the past four and a half years. It is important that we are realistic, but we must endeavour wherever possible to minimise costs and to squeeze out that contingency element as the costs become more accurate.

I will rush to conclude my remarks, although I hope that there will be some leeway for interventions. During the evidence sessions in Alloa, it became clear that Longannet power station might close earlier than the promoter had previously thought. That time is not, however, outside the promoter's estimated range of dates. I believe that the potential early closure increases the need to deliver the rail line now, particularly in consideration of the economic and jobs benefits that it could bring to the area.

As I heard at a business dinner in Alloa last night, several local businesses are considering expanding their operations to take advantage of the freight opportunities that would be provided by the railway. There is strong support for the project in the community. Those opportunities could be seized now if we had a rail link today.

As I have mentioned, ambitious future projects—I will not go into the details, although I have the words in my notes—rely on the development of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine line.

Much detailed work is still to be done before a final decision on the railway can be taken. I believe firmly that the case has been made to approve the general principles of the bill and I now ask the committee to consider the bill in detail. At the consideration stage, the objectors to the bill will, rightly, be given a full and proper hearing. However, the case for the principles of the railway is strong, and the principles are widely supported, not only by local businesses, people and communities, but throughout Scotland.

The bill has historic importance as it concerns the first new rail link to be considered by the Parliament. [*Interruption.*] In recognition of the Presiding Officer's tapping, I end by strongly supporting the committee's recommendations to the Parliament.

15:38

**Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP):** It gives the Scottish National Party great pleasure to support the motion and to endorse Mr Butler's words and the minister's ambition. We have been critical of the fact that, although much rhetoric has been expended in Parliament, there has been little delivery, so it is satisfying to participate in a debate on something on which we are making progress.

As Bill Butler and the minister said, the bill is of significant moment not just for the wee county, but for the whole country. The venture has significant effects elsewhere, because it is not simply about providing a passenger service for Alloa, which is long overdue, or indeed about providing freight and coal access to Longannet. The railway will also free up capacity and improve services in places as diverse as Fife—on the Fife circle—and Ayrshire. It is perhaps too grudging to say that the link is long overdue, but at least we have reached this point.

I have a point about procedure. Mr Butler and the committee deserve a great deal of credit, if not sympathy. However, we will have to review and revisit whether we are using the best method of delivering major rail infrastructure projects. The procedure for the link project is rather an anachronism when the construction of the M74 is dealt with by a public inquiry. A major infrastructure project such as an airport would also probably be dealt with differently. Why are we dealing with road and rail projects differently?

As we approach the introduction of a bill to launch the tramway in Edinburgh, we face being sucked into having never-ending committees to deal with matters that should be dealt with differently. I pay tribute to the committee's work, but we must think about whether using an antediluvian process that is a hangover from Victorian days—indeed, it is a hangover from Westminster—is the best way of delivering major rail infrastructure projects.

**Nicol Stephen:** I support what the member says. Does he welcome a cross-party approach in considering how such projects might be best speeded through the legal and statutory processes? Does he have any views on the best resolution in respect of speeding up the delivery of rail projects in Scotland?

**Mr MacAskill:** Such matters should be non-contentious and non-partisan. Finding the best

possible way of dealing with such matters is in the interests of the Parliament and the country. I do not have any particular views. Perhaps the issue is within the remit of the Procedures Committee; if so, I hope that the committee will deal with it. As I said, an anachronism must be addressed, especially if we are to deliver on other rail projects that the minister and the Executive are committed to and are ambitious to implement. We must find a better way of dealing with matters.

I think that members will find that there will be a spirit of consensus not only on the projects that we hope will be delivered but on the procedure by which they can be delivered. In addition to outside criticism about planning, there will be justifiable criticism within the Parliament if we are left with such an antediluvian delivery framework.

We require to consider some points of clarification and concern. Some of those points are specific matters and some are general. On general matters, who will deliver the project? Will the Scottish Executive or transport Scotland deliver it? Clarification is required. If transport Scotland is to deliver it, will it have the appropriate powers to do so?

We also need to know who will operate the rail line. An assumption is being made that Network Rail will operate it, but so far I have not heard Network Rail confirm that it will. We simply assume that it will operate the line because it operates almost every other line, apart from lines such as that from Bo'ness to Kinneil. There has been no commitment. Given the press leaks earlier this week about Network Rail retrenching various aspects of its work to Leeds—I know that the minister is concerned about that—we cannot necessarily rest assured that Network Rail will fulfil the ambitions of not only the Executive but the Parliament. We must have some control. Transport Scotland should not only deliver the project, but perhaps operate the line to ensure that there is joined-up delivery and joined-up transport. The minister correctly touched on that issue in respect of Rosyth and other work.

On specific matters, we should recognise that the Rosyth link is important, as the minister said. I appreciate that there are difficulties in ensuring that the line goes to Rosyth, but we are in danger of making a grave mistake if that short link on that short journey is not made now. I understand from the rail sector that the bulk of the costs for extending the line into the port of Rosyth relate to signalling and that the cost of the rail infrastructure is fairly minimal. If a little bit extra is not spent now to take the line into Rosyth and to give us the critical nucleus of a transport hub there, costs will be significantly more, because people will have to go back to the beginning to rejig and rejuggle all the signalling. That is where the major costs lie;

they do not lie in the physical infrastructure and the provision of the line. We must consider extending the line to Rosyth.

In respect of Clackmannan, it is not just the provision of a rail link for passengers to Alloa that is important. We must ensure that, rather than simply allowing passengers to go from Alloa through Stirling to Glasgow, we consider creating the opportunity for people from Alloa to go eastwards towards Dunfermline. Work is available in Dunfermline and, in many cases, there is a shortage of labour. We must consider how to move passenger services east as well as west and how to allow Clackmannan to benefit from the creation of loops so that places such as Cambus are not denied access to freight. The minister touched on that matter. Again, we are talking about a short distance, but there would be significant gains.

I have spoken about specific and general matters that must be addressed. However, fundamentally, we support the project, which is long overdue and very welcome. We must find new methods of ensuring that we deliver similar projects in due course, as we need to speed up the delivery of those projects that have so far not been delivered in modern Scotland. We pay tribute to all those who have worked hard and endeavoured to deliver the project so far.

15:44

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** I have found it to be both a pleasure and interesting to serve on the committee and to be involved with the project. I have some sympathy with the comments that Kenny MacAskill made. Similar comments have also been made by Bristow Muldoon, with whom it is unusual for me to agree in a transport debate. We must look into the way in which the matter has required to be handled and consider the whole committee procedure.

Most members are probably intimately familiar with the route of the proposed line. However, for those who are, like me, new to the matter, I should point out that much of the line of the track for the proposed link already exists—the bulk of the route is not virgin territory, although there are alternative proposals for parts of it. We must consider whether the procedure that has been gone through is overly cumbersome compared with the procedure that would have been followed in relation to a road.

Given the rules that are set down, however, I believe that the Parliament has done well. When the Parliament does things well, we should recognise that. I pay tribute to the committee's convener, Bill Butler, who has presided over the proceedings—mainly in Alloa town hall—with great

diligence. I also pay tribute to my fellow committee members, particularly Richard Baker, who always sat in front of me, thus saving me from the draught.

I pay particular tribute to our clerking and technical staff. As members will appreciate, the committee had to consider highly technical evidence about vibration, level crossings and environmental issues—as Bill Butler said, the environmental statement, which had to be satisfactory to the committee, has been one of the most contentious elements of the process. Without the technical support, members would have found it much more difficult to put forward our case.

The matter has been discussed in an open and accessible way. I was gratified by the number of ordinary members of the public who felt able to come along to Alloa town hall to participate in our meetings and I am sure that they will do so again when the committee goes back for the next stage. That is why, as a committee member, I do not want to say too much about the objectives—the committee will have to return to them.

I was heartened by the Minister for Transport's evidence at the preliminary stage. I felt able to sign up to the report because he stated that, regardless of the fact that the worst-case scenario might develop at Longannet, he would still provide the funding that he had promised. That is important, because the evidence about Longannet that emerged was different from the evidence that the promoter had initially given.

I was disappointed by the lack of liaison between the promoter and Scottish Power about that information. It would have been preferable for the information to have been available at the start of the process rather than for the committee to have to tease it out. If the information in some of the other presentations that we received at our initial evidence session had been much more clearly focused, that would have aided the process.

On the committee's final evidence session, if our friends in the Scottish Environment Protection Agency had bothered to read any of the documents on the consultation, the committee's work might have been a lot easier and there would have been no thought of having to wade into a river with jam jars. I hope that SEPA and others have learned lessons from that.

For those of us who support rail links elsewhere in Scotland—notably the proposed Borders rail link—the most important point that emerged from the process came when Nicol Stephen said:

“It is important to emphasise that the whole Scottish transport appraisal guidance process is about more than simply the NPV figure. We assess any appraisal under the five criteria that have been mentioned. It is clear that this

scheme has many benefits that are not captured in the NPV calculation.”—[*Official Report, Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee*, 10 November 2003; c 116.]

That makes it quite clear that a proposed scheme that produces a negative net present value will, rightly, not necessarily be ruled out for consideration for Scottish Executive funding.

A compelling case has been made for reopening the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine railway. As a committee member, I am happy to support the convener's motion and to continue to support the project.

15:51

**Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** I, too, support the motion in Bill Butler's name that the Parliament agree to the general principles of the bill. We have already heard about the economic benefits that Clackmannanshire would derive from the reopening of the line. After all, Clackmannanshire is the only local authority area in the central belt that does not have rail access, which has been to its detriment. Reopening the railway line will have major benefits not only for Clackmannanshire, but for Stirling, as I am sure my colleague Sylvia Jackson will mention later.

I will concentrate on the economic and social benefits that the line will have for Dunfermline and wider Fife. As we know, a large proportion of the opencast coal that is required for Longannet power station originates in the west of Scotland, which necessitates a major amount of road and rail transportation. As far as rail transport is concerned, the coal has to be brought across the Forth bridge to Longannet via the Charlestown junction just outside Dunfermline Town station. However, as trains can access that single-line junction only on the down line, the coal freight trains for Kincardine have to go either all the way around the Fife circle through Burntisland and Kirkcaldy or up to Townhill sidings outside Dunfermline to be recoupled and brought back down the line. That is a major impediment to passenger services on the east coast main line and the Fife circle.

Fife passenger services have improved tremendously over the past few years. However, those of us—me included—who use the service regularly will know that it is not totally adequate to deal with the increasing number of people who require to travel to Edinburgh.

**Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab):** Does Scott Barrie agree that removing the coal freight trains from those Fife lines will increase service reliability, which, along with overcrowding, is a big issue for my constituents and his constituents? Does he agree that such a measure will improve

the situation for those people, who must be among the most patient rail users in Scotland?

**Scott Barrie:** Indeed. In fact, I was about to make that very point. As other members have acknowledged, removing the coal freight trains from the Fife circle and the east coast main line might increase the frequency of services across the Forth and, almost as important, might result in a more reliable service.

Rail capacity is not the only problem. The amount of road traffic, in particular coal lorries, that goes through Kincardine village is absolutely horrendous. Members will be aware that I have raised that issue before. The Executive is currently overseeing the completion of the eastern link road, which will make a difference to some of the traffic that goes through the village, particularly the coal lorries that go to Longannet power station. The new Kincardine bridge will also help in that respect. However, the reopening of the line will allow us to ensure that most of the coal is transported by rail rather than by lorry, which will go a long way towards making the constituents who have been plagued by that road traffic problem for more than a quarter of a century very happy indeed.

Kenny MacAskill talked about the Rosyth ferry terminal, to which we can open up access in two directions by rail. We have the existing line from Inverkeithing, but with a wee bit of extra planning we can also create the possibility of bringing freight in from the west. The economic argument relies not only on the viability of Longannet power station, but on building up Rosyth as a truly international ferry port. That is certainly something that I would endorse.

I shall turn briefly to the objections to the scheme. The proposals are clearly of major concern to people who have bought property since the railway was closed. Kincardine constituents in Hawkhill Road, Kilbagie Street and particularly Ochil View have real concerns about the reopening of the line. Ochil View is a new development, built on rafts, and the points that Bill Butler made about noise and environmental impact are key issues for the residents. Those people need to be listened to.

I am interested in the fact that—if we assume that Parliament approves the bill's general principles—the role of the committee during the next phase of the legislative process will be to act as an arbiter between the promoter and the objectors. I am sure that the committee, which was courteous in listening to the objections from a large number of people during the preliminary stage, will continue with its work in that respect. I hope that we will be able to come to a resolution.

I take this opportunity to point out to members of the committee, as they are all present, that there is

a good alternative route that would appease almost all the objectors in Kincardine. As members who know the route will know, a bad S-bend leads from the old Kincardine power station to where the old Kincardine railway station was. Land has now become available between that and the Forth shore. That land is currently owned by Scottish Power, which is quite willing for the line to be realigned. That would remove the S-bend and take the line a considerable distance from the residents of Ochil View, thus resolving their objection.

I thank members of the committee for their diligence and work to date. I hope that the Parliament will endorse the principles of the bill tonight. I also hope, for the sake of Richard Baker's general health, that in whatever venue is used for the next meeting, David Mundell will offer to sit in the draught to protect my poor colleague.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to the open debate. I wish to call every member who has pressed their button, so I shall set the time limit at a strict five minutes.

15:58

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** It is nice to see that, yet again, the Fife mafia are in the chamber today. Many of the comments that I shall make will support what Scott Barrie and Marilyn Livingstone have said. Having spent some time reading the committee's report and the evidence, I pay genuine tribute to committee members and clerks for the work that they have done on behalf of the Parliament. Their work has been time consuming and extremely thorough. In holding its meetings in Alloa, the committee has truly gone out to the people of Clackmannan to hear their views.

Paragraph 50 of the committee report states:

"the Committee is convinced that the freight/passenger options that would be provided by the S-A-K route could be the catalyst for a major boost to the development of the local economy through attracting new business and encouraging the growth of existing enterprises."

That alone would have been sufficient to merit support for the general principles of the bill, but the successful development and expansion of Scotland's wider rail network is dependent on the reopening of the line. As Scott Barrie and other members have said, the development will free up capacity on the Forth bridge and in Fife. According to English Welsh & Scottish Railway, the beneficial effect of the development will be felt right across the network. As Marilyn Livingstone said, reliability and frequency of service on the Fife to Edinburgh line has not been given the attention that it deserves and is a priority. Freeing up freight from that line gives us an opportunity to ensure that the passenger service from Fife is the best that it can be and that Fife can benefit from the investment

that it has been starved of for at least the past 25 years.

As has been said, the proposal is incomplete. There is no indication of who will operate the railway and I would have liked the comfort of some agreement, in principle, on that. Nicol Stephen said that the Executive will support the line and I am heartened by his comment that he will try to ensure that the line is developed as far as Rosyth to link with the ferry terminal. That is absolutely essential, because we must make sure that we get all the benefits from the line.

Earlier this year, Nicol Stephen said:

"I want not only to support the principles of the project, but to help to develop it."—[*Official Report*, 12 June 2003; c 743.]

I urge the minister to ensure that the project's benefits are extended beyond Clackmannanshire to Fife. The line should be extended to Rosyth, to take advantage of freight and passengers going to and coming from the ferry terminal. There is an opportunity to develop the project and open up access to Europe. That opportunity must be grasped and I urge the minister to roll out Rosyth proposals alongside the consideration and implementation of the project, if it is agreed by the Parliament. Kenny MacAskill almost said earlier that for a ha'p'orth of tar, the ship was spoiled. The project and the line will be spoiled if the huge benefits that would accrue from extending the line to Rosyth are not grasped. I urge the minister to take that on board and to ensure that we get all the benefits of the project.

16:02

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I have been on the same journey as the other committee members. We dealt with a great deal of evidence, both written and oral, and no stone was left unturned in examining the evidence and the issues before we arrived at today's debate on the preliminary stage report.

I join David Mundell in congratulating Bill Butler on his convenership of the committee. I enjoyed the meetings, even though I had to act as a windbreak for David. I also thank Scott Barrie for mentioning that; perhaps I have found my niche. I pay particular tribute to the clerks, who had to deal with the great number of hefty documents that made up the evidence and who ensured that the committee meetings took place efficiently in Alloa—the committee's work has been brought to the area in which the decisions on the bill will have an impact.

I would like to record the fact that I found the site visit extremely useful. Committee members were given the chance to see exactly where the new line will run, which enabled us to see clearly the

areas that will benefit from the new line and the properties whose residents argue would be adversely affected by the proposal. It was pleasing to see good attendances at the committee meetings in Alloa. Local people have clearly taken a great and active interest in the matter and I am sure that we will see some of those who attended our first evidence-taking sessions again when we return to Alloa to gather evidence for our deliberations at the consideration stage.

Today, we are debating our report on the bill's general principles. The committee has concluded that we should recommend that Parliament agree to the general principles of the bill and that the bill continue as a private bill. We have received written and oral evidence from some of the objectors to the bill, including the Kincardine railway concern group. Those objections and others will be fully examined at the consideration stage. Inevitably, I will touch on some of what Bill Butler and other committee members have said, but I want to mention some of the issues that the committee considered during its evidence-taking sessions.

The committee acknowledges in its report that some of the benefits of the railway may be

“difficult to quantify at this stage”,

but I believe that we worked hard to ensure that our conclusions were based on the most robust evidence that we could obtain. We pushed witnesses for that evidence. We asked MVA for revised net present value figures in the light of new information on Longannet's potential lifespan and we pressed the promoter for full details of the consultation that had taken place with residents.

We heard a great deal about the benefits that the railway could bring to Clackmannanshire, both from representatives of the local authority and from Scottish Enterprise. We did not just accept Scottish Enterprise's hypothesis; we gained hard evidence of businesses that would be attracted to the area if the railway line went ahead. As Bill Butler said, that information was supplied to the committee confidentially.

As the report says, it soon became clear that the anticipated lifespan of the Longannet power station in MVA's original benefit study did not tally with Scottish Power's assessment. That complicated our assessment of the economic benefit. The future of Longannet is not clear cut; if electricity prices change, Scottish Power could viably make the necessary changes for the station to meet the new environmental directives and so prolong its life. The lack of dialogue between the promoter and Scottish Power, to which David Mundell referred, was concerning. However, it was reassuring for the committee to hear from the minister the Executive's assessment that, despite

the revisions in the economic-benefit case, investment in the project was still appropriate and valuable.

Of course there are other benefits to the scheme. I have referred to the evidence that we heard from local authorities and Scottish Enterprise on the potential local economic benefit, but another area of potential benefit is the freeing up of rail paths as coal freight is transferred from being transported across the Forth rail bridge. That presents the opportunity for improved services for passengers on the east coast line, which would be a significant development, as Scott Barrie and Marilyn Livingstone said.

We also heard that the reopening of the line would have other effects on the overall strategy for improving rail services. The scheme represents one of the biggest contributions to meeting the target of 80 per cent growth in freight transported by rail this decade; although it represents only about 0.5 per cent of that target, it is still one of the single biggest contributions.

The committee has concluded that the proposed line will bring clear benefits in public policy terms. I urge the Parliament to support the general principles of the bill and I look forward to the consideration stage, when we will hear further evidence from the objectors and the promoter.

16:06

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** Nicol Stephen and others have been generous in their remarks about the members of the bill committee but, like David Mundell and Richard Baker, I extend those remarks to the clerks and expert advisers who have done a power of work.

It has been a privilege to work on the bill and not only to be involved in a first for the Parliament but to feel connected to our Victorian forebears whose private acts of Parliament enabled the building of the magnificent railway network that they left us—although I take on board the valid point that Kenny MacAskill made.

The bill does not open up an addition to the rail network, but seeks to empower the sponsors of the bill to reopen 21km of line that have lain unused for many years. In preparation for dealing with the bill, I dug out an old quarter-inch map of the Firth of Forth, which cost five shillings and sixpence, so it is not new. It was published in 1964 and reprinted with the addition of new major roads in 1967. In a way, that illustrates what the 1960s were all about—railways out; roads in. I am pleased that we are doing something to reverse that decline in the railways.

In the first instance, the committee's job was to examine the proposals in order to satisfy



ourselves on various counts that the bill should proceed to its next stage. In doing so, the interconnectedness of things has become apparent. Members might not think immediately that the price of electricity would have a bearing on our deliberations, but an issue of real concern that emerged was the length of Longannet's operating life. Because of modifications that will be required to meet increasingly stringent controls on polluting emissions, there is a question mark over whether it will be commercially sensible to fund the modifications or whether operations should be closed down altogether. We explored that issue in depth and were able to satisfy ourselves that the implications of early closure of Longannet power station were not enough to tip the balance against reopening the line.

We had concerns about parts of the environmental statement in relation to noise and vibration and the line's potential impact on a candidate conservation area and a historical monument, which we explored in our evidence-taking and discussions. Part of the argument for proceeding with the project relates to the economic benefits that it will generate, mainly through more direct and faster rail transport of coal between Hunterston and Longannet.

The availability of a rail freight option is a factor for businesses that are considering locating in Alloa. The opportunity to extend the passenger service to Alloa, thus enabling direct rail access to Stirling and Glasgow, will make Alloa a more attractive place in which to live and work. It has been argued that easier access to Alloa and Clackmannanshire will encourage tourists and visitors. I can vouch for the immediate effect of the bill: I had never been to Alloa or the surrounding area but, having travelled there on a site visit and to committee meetings, I have every intention of going back. The tourist visitor numbers in Clackmannanshire will be up by two as soon as I have leisure to go and enjoy that lovely part of our country.

I mentioned interconnectedness which, as others have said, is evident in the fact that opening the rail link for freight will take slow coal trains off the Forth rail bridge and will open up capacity, thus allowing increased reliability and perhaps expansion of services from Fife to Edinburgh, locally, and on the east coast main line, with wider benefits. Other genuine opportunities should be kept in mind. We cannot do everything at once, but I hope that we will come back to the matter. In the meantime, on the basis of the work that we have done to date, I am happy to join my colleagues in recommending to Parliament that the bill proceed to its next stage.

16:11

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am pleased to contribute in support of Clackmannanshire Council's bill to promote the new railway line from Stirling to Kincardine via Alloa. I commend Bill Butler and his colleagues on the bill committee for the work that they have put in—work that is evident from their speeches this afternoon.

The construction of the new railway line will be of considerable benefit to my Fife constituents who live in the area and to people further afield, because the railway line will, in due course, become part of the national network. Not only will the development of the railway be of direct benefit to individual constituents, but it will make an important economic contribution. If the economy is to thrive, Government has an important role in providing suitable infrastructure to allow easy movement of goods and people around the country. It is a function of Government to provide transport spending and I welcome the Scottish Executive's proposed investment in this particular project. It is to be hoped that the construction of the railway will act as a stimulus to economic development in the area.

I particularly welcome the new rail link if it means that we can go further than we do at the moment in removing freight from our roads. With increasing vehicle traffic, we should be looking for all opportunities to move freight off roads and on to rail. That is not always practical, however—transporting freight by rail works only when both the supplier and the customer are within easy reach of a rail head. However, I understand that the new rail link offers opportunities, particularly in delivery of coal, a bulk product that is especially suited to transportation by rail.

As a number of members have said, another advantage in moving coal on to this route and off the Forth rail bridge will, we hope, be improvement in reliability of passenger trains on the bridge. I have heard numerous complaints from constituents about the lack of reliability in the current services. If we can improve that reliability, it would be most welcome.

I understand that, since privatisation of the railways, the volume of freight that is moved by rail has increased by some 50 per cent. That is an excellent and welcome statistic, but we should always be looking to increase that figure. If I may, I will mention two examples where I believe that that could be done.

I recently visited the Highland Spring Ltd factory at Blackford in Perthshire. Highland Spring is a very successful and growing business; it is now one of the largest employers in Perth and Kinross. The bottled water that it produces in bulk is

presently delivered throughout the UK by road, but the company would be very interested in transferring its product to rail. The factory lies immediately beside the Perth to Stirling main line, and immediately adjacent to the disused Blackford station, so transfer to rail must be a serious possibility. A local campaign is under way to have Blackford station reopened for passenger traffic and I understand that Highland Spring has commissioned a feasibility study into utilising the station, with suitable adjustments and sidings, to allow transport of goods by rail. That would bring considerable benefits to Highland Spring as a business, to the wider economy of Perth and Kinross and, indeed, to Scotland. There would also be benefits to the environment if the development were able to proceed. I have written to the minister to encourage him to look favourably on the proposal when it crosses his desk.

I will give another brief example of goods that are transported by road at present that could be transported by rail. On Monday, I met representatives of the Forestry Commission at Inver, by Dunkeld. There is a plan for major tree felling at Rannoch forest in Perthshire. At present, that would involve transfer of logs in large vehicles over small country roads, which would not only cause damage to the roads, but disruption and inconvenience to people living in the area. However, the west Highland line passes nearby in the forest and the Forestry Commission has a proposal to load the timber directly onto freight wagons. As there is no siding at the appropriate point, that is heavily dependent on the timing of trains on the west Highland line, but the Forestry Commission seems to be confident that any problems in that regard can be overcome.

There is still a problem in relation to English Welsh & Scottish Railway Ltd, the freight operators, agreeing a realistic cost. If the minister were able to ease the way, that would be welcomed by the community and would have major environmental benefits. I am sure that both the Forestry Commission and Highland Spring would make excellent use of the new rail line between Kincardine, Stirling and Alloa.

I feel that I might have digressed a little from the strict subject matter of the bill before us. However, I think that there are wider issues about the expansion of rail that should be addressed and I thought that it would be remiss of me to miss the opportunity to raise them in this debate.

I support the general principles of the bill and wish every speed to the project.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I was unsure which page of the report you were talking about.

16:16

**Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I congratulate the promoter of the bill and the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee, which has put in a lot of hard work while independently scrutinising the basic principles of the bill to enable it to proceed to the consideration stage.

Since I became involved in politics in the early 1990s, the Stirling to Alloa rail route has always been writ large across the political landscape of Stirling and Clackmannan. In 1999, when I was a candidate in the first Scottish Parliament elections, Donald Dewar's visit to Alloa's town centre resulted in a bare-knuckle punch-up between Labour and SNP activists in the middle of the high street. At that time, the Green party was organising a photo-call on the abandoned railway lines next to the old Alloa station.

We are delighted that we are moving towards reopening the line. It is irrefutable that the line has significant local importance. I reiterate comments that were made earlier to the effect that the railway will put Clackmannanshire and Alloa back on the map. It will also take hundreds of freight lorries off the roads every day. Those freight lorries pass through communities causing pollution and misery and lead to escalating road maintenance costs for local authorities. The line's reopening will also help to reduce congestion caused in Stirling by commuter traffic, some of which comes from Clackmannanshire.

I will leave aside the local importance of the line to say that the railway also has enormous strategic regional importance. If we are to bring about a genuine renaissance in passenger and freight rail in this century, we need a route that follows the northern bank of the Forth. That will alleviate pressure on the network on the south of the Forth and on the Forth rail bridge. We have already heard today that freight traffic on the Forth rail bridge is a problem. I add that inadequate signalling on the bridge is a problem that limits the volume of passenger traffic that can pass over the bridge.

It is important that we build capacity in our rail network. I would like a route to be opened from Stirling to Dunfermline with the potential to open an offshoot down to the Rosyth port.

The bill is good; the only aspect that is a little disappointing is that it proposes only one new station, which will be in Alloa, although a good case could be made for reopening more stations along the route. As an ex-student of the University of Stirling, I suspect that there will be significant demand for a station at Causewayhead, for example.

On the reopening of stations, the community rail partnership approach, which involves local authorities and other organisations that are based in communities, has met with success elsewhere. That approach could be useful not only in building a case for reopening stations but, once they are open, for encouraging innovative use of the stations with communities' full backing.

I am aware that there have been some local concerns about noise and vibration, but the use of modern track and freight bogeys will allay most of those concerns and, although I am pleased that the bill committee found that the mitigation measures that are proposed in the environmental statement will be adequate, I stress that we need those measures to be implemented fully. I will be extremely disappointed if, in construction of the railway, corners are cut and funding is cut, which will mean that mitigation measures are not put in place.

**Scott Barrie:** I take the point about continuous rail making a huge difference to noise levels, but does Mark Ruskell accept that some of the objections are about not only noise but the proximity of the proposed line to a new housing development? When that development was built, it was not envisaged that the line would ever be reopened, and the objection is also about the fact that some of the houses are extremely close to the railway line.

**Mr Ruskell:** I accept that, and those are issues that need to be dealt with further during the consideration stage, perhaps even with regard to compensatory measures.

Today is a good day for Clackmannanshire, but the bill must be only the first step towards an expanded rail network. I call on the Executive to take the strategic view and find out how we can develop more of a mid-Scotland and Fife rail route that runs along the northern side of the Forth.

16:21

**Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab):** Although I enjoyed Murdo Fraser's meanderings up to Crianlarich and Tyndrum with timber freight, I will try to keep to the bill in my speech.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate because, as I have constituents who are directly affected, I have not been allowed direct input to the bill committee. It is therefore good to air some of the issues that my constituents have raised with me, to which I will come later. That said, as the promoter, the minister and all speakers today have said, the bill is an important step forward and will bring great benefits, particularly for Clackmannanshire. In Stirling, we will welcome the prospect of fewer cars coming into the city.

Bill Butler ably outlined the bill's objectives, so I will not labour those, but I like the comment in the promoter's memorandum that the project would reinstate

"a missing link in the national network",

which indeed it would, with the passenger service from Alloa to Stirling leading to connections to Glasgow and elsewhere, as well as the longer route for freight and the opportunity for an extension to Rosyth, which all speakers have welcomed.

As always with such documents, some of its history interested me, such as hearing about the Stirling and Dunfermline Railway Company. Nora Radcliffe remarked on some of the other historical context for the bill, which I might be able to explore at a later date.

The fact that the bill is a private bill is to be welcomed because, in addition to the arguments on the bill being necessary because of the abandoned nature of some of the railway line and the fact that Network Rail would not have all the powers to deal with the matter, it has allowed the full environmental impact assessment. It was important that the committee consider the environmental statement very carefully, and I am sure that constituents in Fife, Stirling and Ochil will examine extremely closely the information that is to come on the vibration and noise study. It is important that the opportunity be given to members of the community, such as Causewayhead community council, to make their representations at a later date.

The rationales for the development are all agreed: improving economic development in Clackmannanshire; improving the public transport system; and enabling a better freight service, which will take lorries off the road. Scott Barrie mentioned how reopening the route will allow for more passenger services over the Forth bridge, which should be more reliable.

One of my concerns about the bill was raised in paragraph 52 of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee's preliminary stage report. It states:

"The Committee notes that Network Rail ... provided evidence that careful timetabling would be required in order for the diversion of the Longannet coal traffic via Stirling to be accommodated without a detrimental effect on the current passenger and freight timetables applicable to the Scottish central route between Motherwell and Stirling."

We will certainly be asking for assurances from both the Minister for Transport and the bill committee that those points will be taken on board, and that we will have reliable services and no cuts in the services that Stirling enjoys to Glasgow, Edinburgh and destinations in the north.

There is no doubt that the Scottish Executive's transport delivery report, the local council's transport strategies and the "Clackmannanshire and Stirling Structure Plan", as well as the Strategic Rail Authority and the Scottish Enterprise network whole-heartedly support the development of the route. With a predicted increase of 20 per cent in road traffic over the next 20 years, we certainly need initiatives such as the reopening of the route so that we can try to stem that increase. There is to be an 80 per cent increase in the volume of freight, and other statistics are included in the committee's report. As the minister said, reopening the route is a good step forward in that regard.

I turn to some points that have been made to me by Causewayhead community council and individual constituents, relating to the effects of vibration and noise on properties that are directly next to the railway line. I welcome the fact that Causewayhead community council is to come and give evidence in February or March next year, and I also welcome the setting up of the Arup study to examine the issue. Speed restrictions will be an on-going issue, and points were raised about noise barriers and anything else that can prevent noise travelling to properties, including planting by developers, Network Rail or whoever is to take over.

Frequency of freight trains has been mentioned; I am told that there will be up to 18 trains a day, so we will certainly need to know more about that. Night traffic is obviously something that constituents are not very happy about. The promoter's memorandum says:

"The ability to use heavier and faster coal trains also improves line capacity on the Ayrshire Coast route."

I ask that it be taken on board that that should not increase levels of vibration and noise. I hope that that will be covered in the study that has been recommended.

Mark Ruskell made a very good point about the possibility of opening more stations and it has been suggested to me that Causewayhead would be a very convenient place to have a station, not only for the University of Stirling but—if there was additional car-parking space—for the large number of people who come into that part of Stirling.

The benefits of reopening the route to Clackmannanshire will be enormous. The £4 million investment by the Scottish Executive that allowed for completion of the so-called road to nowhere, the A907, has already improved traffic flow between Alloa and Stirling. Having used that road with children for many years, I can say that it is much improved. The £30 million investment in the rail link will lead to vast improvements.

Hopefully, people will use the railway instead of their cars, and job prospects will be improved. We might not want house prices to rise, but the railway will certainly improve the housing market in the Alloa area.

The Presiding Officer is not in the chair or in the chamber, but I am sure that, as the constituency member for Ochil, he would welcome my support for the bill.

16:30

**Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am pleased to participate in the debate. I recall a debate on the possibility of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine line being reopened in the first session of Parliament, which was sponsored by Nick Johnston. We seem to have travelled some distance, both in time and cost, to get to where we are today.

While looking through my file, I discovered that in the days when Wendy Alexander was a minister there was an announcement that the cost of establishing the railway was going to be some £24 million. If my memory serves me correctly, I am pretty certain that before that, the project had been costed at less than £20 million. I mention that in relation to my earlier intervention, in which I raised the issue of the contingency costs being put at £9.9 million, when the budgeted expenditure on the railway is £37 million. Given that there has already been a significant increase in the costs of the project, it is probably wise to have a contingency of £9.9 million.

That is the sort of the issue that the bill committee will be expected to tease out, along with many of the other points that members have made today. I pay due respect to Bill Butler and his fellow bill committee members for the work that they have done so far.

A small point that I would like to mention is the fact that it would be useful for parliamentary reports to include a full map when they deal with projects such a railway line or a road. Members such as Nora Radcliffe might well be able to source rather old maps that show the line, but even though we can source maps through our research teams, we should also be aware that the wider public has access to parliamentary reports and it would be of some use and interest to them to have a more comprehensive explanation of where the line will go. That is not a niggle—it is just a suggestion for improving the way in which we present our information to the public.

A number of useful points have been made. Today's debate is the first that I have attended from which a member such as Murdo Fraser has managed to extract two press releases, rather than just the statutory one. Of course, he was

correct in what he said, because the report says that the establishment of the railway line will affect the entire rail network in Scotland by having a knock-on effect on train timetables and many other aspects. Therefore, it is quite pertinent to draw into the debate consideration of issues such as what might happen in Dunkeld and Blackford.

I would like to add that, if there were to be a station at Blackford, it would take off the pressure on Dunblane station. If the railway line were to go ahead and the station at Alloa were to open, that would take off the pressure on Bridge of Allan station. That is what happens once such stations are reopened. During the campaign for the May elections, I went to Bridge of Allan station to try to win support from voters. I found that to be rather futile, not because I was a Conservative, but because most of the people there were from Alloa—they had driven in their cars to get to Bridge of Allan station. Needless to say, I did not spend many more days there.

I thought that it was a tad unfair of Tricia Marwick to say that the Fife Labour mafia was in attendance—

**Tricia Marwick:** I referred to the Fife mafia, which includes me as well as the Labour members.

**Mr Monteith:** I am sorry that I embellished what the member said with the word “Labour”; I was going to make the point that it was rather unfair of Tricia Marwick to say what she said, given that Christine May was not here: there is no show without Punch.

As well as making some important and well-made points on the regeneration of Fife, Scott Barrie raised the issue of the Ochil View residents’ objections. In respect of the objections of the residents of Ochil View and Causewayhead, I would like the committee to take up the issue of compensation, where it will come from and how it might be agreed. If we are trying to allay the fears of local residents but find that, in some respects, they cannot be allayed, the residents might be satisfied by adequate compensation. That issue has to be considered.

Mark Ruskell made the useful point that a station—although I suggest a halt—could be incorporated into the line. A halt at Causewayhead might go some way to allaying the fears of the objectors from Causewayhead. A nearby railway station or halt at Causewayhead might ensure that property values do not fall, and might instead make it a more attractive proposition to sell property.

The debate has been useful and it is useful to bring such issues through Parliament in this way. It allows members the opportunity to discuss matters and the bill committee to consider them in detail. I commend the bill to Parliament.

16:36

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the report. I should say to Brian Monteith that maps are available in the Scottish Parliament information centre.

**Mr Monteith:** Only for us.

**Alasdair Morgan:** The maps are also available in libraries around the country. However, the fact that they run to 40 sheets of A1 paper might be a good reason for not including them with the report.

I am glad to participate in a debate on reopening a railway line. After leaving university, my first job was with British Rail and I was associated—in a non-guilty fashion I hasten to add—with the closure of the Newport and St Andrews lines. That was in 1969 and the line to Alloa had been closed three months previously. I also notice that the Kincardine passenger service, which it is not planned to reopen yet, went out of service as early as 1930, so it might have a longer period of slumber.

Although it is difficult to quantify, the increase in the economic potential for Alloa and Clackmannanshire is one of the most important aspects of the proposal. We have also heard about the benefits to rail traffic on other routes, particularly on the Forth rail bridge, which is a severe bottleneck because of its signalling and its severe speed restrictions for freight trains. Any line that caters for slow-moving freight trains along with fast-moving passenger trains is a recipe for disaster. That is particularly true of the type of coal trains that we are talking about that use fairly elderly ex-merry-go-round wagons.

As an occasional traveller on the Fife circle, I am also aware of the delays that can be caused. The most recent one that I faced was on Tuesday morning.

I know that there have been question marks about whether EWS will release freight paths. Even if it does not release the freight paths and uses them for other freight trains, that will still benefit the economy because lack of paths for freight trains is one of the biggest single issues that is stifling the development of rail freight throughout Scotland.

I will touch on the length and complexity of the bill process. We need to consider that matter again in the longer term, and other members have also alluded to that. On 10 November, Keir Bloomer of Clackmannanshire Council stated in evidence:

“The Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine railway is probably the easiest railway link in Scotland to reopen.”—[*Official Report, Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee*, 10 November 2003; c 111.]

The rails are in place along the length of the route, although I accept that they will have to be lifted and reused because in their current state they could be used only by a train preceded by a man waving a red flag. However, if this is the easiest link in Scotland to reopen, what on earth is it going to be like once we start to reopen some of the more difficult lines? That is a strong argument for looking more closely at the process before we have to go through it again.

On the time scale, there is some indication in the evidence that, since the idea was first raised, the process has not moved as fast as some of us would have liked. I have noticed that a small part of the powers taken in the bill replace existing powers under the British Railways (No 2) Order Confirmation Act 1994. That has not been exercised to date and it will expire very soon. Of course, that is the same problem that is affecting the Larkhall link, work on which I hope will start in the near future. It says a lot about the lack of commitment—I will not say on the part of whom, other than to say on the part of all agencies that needed to be involved—that the powers were taken and not exercised over almost 10 years. Clearly, we are now at a better stage in our promotion of rail transport in Scotland.

Another criticism made in the evidence for the report is that some parts of the bill—notably part 2—include compulsory purchase provisions. The criticism is not of the bill, but of the confused state of compulsory purchase legislation in Scotland today, which has made part 2 necessary. One of the footnotes to the report notes that compulsory purchase legislation in England was reformed as long ago as 1965. Clearly, because of the lack of time for Scottish legislation at Westminster, reform of the Scottish legislation was not done at that time. I hope that the Justice Department will address the issue in the near future.

On the life expectancy of Longannet, I have read the evidence, and all I will say is that projecting the source of new power supplies—in particular when looking more than 10 years into the future—is not an exact science. Even if we meet the Executive's targets for renewable energy, we will need some baseload and back-up supply. Even if Longannet power station is no longer there in its current form in 10 or 15 years, there may well be another power station there, which may be equally reliant on rail freight.

**Mr Ruskell:** Will the member give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):** No, the member is over time.

**Alasdair Morgan:** I welcome the bill, and I hope that the project reaches fruition in the near future.

16:42

**Nicol Stephen:** Today is the start of something significant for Scotland—the first of several proposals to transform Scotland's railways by expanding the network and providing new and better services for passengers and freight. It is important to proceed as quickly as possible, and to instil confidence that we can deliver major new projects at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I welcome Kenny MacAskill's views on the need to examine our approach to delivering such projects. Bill Butler and the members of the committee, who have been directly involved, will have a key role to play in advising on the issues. I am pleased to offer my support, and offer to join a cross-party approach on the issues, to ensure that we can speed up the delivery of major rail projects in Scotland by making best use of the Executive and the Parliament.

Today, we have to focus on the merits of the case put by Clackmannanshire Council as promoter and decide whether the principles of the proposal for the railway have been established. I hope that we will agree unanimously and with enthusiasm that they have been and that we will take the project forward to consideration stage. In doing that, we ask the committee to maintain the excellent progress that it has already made. As has rightly been mentioned, it is important for all concerned—objectors as well as promoter—that the committee's hearings are fair and objective. It is also important to reach an early resolution of the issues. I am confident that the committee will do exactly that and move the project forward swiftly, provided that we give it the endorsement that it deserves today.

I support the bill because of the many significant benefits that the scheme will bring. Three primary achievements will arise from the project. First, we will reconnect Alloa to the rail network and create significant new opportunities for Clackmannanshire. Secondly, we will provide a more efficient route for freight from Hunterston to Longannet power station. Thirdly, we will enable the introduction of improved passenger services between Edinburgh and Fife.

I agree with Alasdair Morgan that if the railway allowed only new freight services across the Forth rail bridge, that would be a benefit in itself, but the opportunity will be created for both improved freight services and badly needed passenger service improvements.

I will give members the story of the current rail journey that the coal trucks must take. The route from Hunterston to Longannet is less than impressive. The coal travels through Ayrshire to the Edinburgh to Glasgow line, then along the line through Winchburgh and Dalmeny, over the Forth

rail bridge—where it clogs up rail space on the east coast main line between Edinburgh and Fife—and up to Dunfermline, where locomotives must turn round, after which they return west along the north shore of the Forth to the power station.

The new route that we propose is 18 miles shorter and will be significantly faster. The scheme will surely give Scottish Power a clear incentive to shift more coal freight from road to rail. As Scott Barrie said well, far too many coal lorries still trundle through the towns and communities in the area.

Apart from the three primary reasons that I mentioned, many other reasons can be given for supporting the line. The railway will give the local economy a significant boost, as it will create inward investment and give the local business community the confidence to expand its businesses. The line will bring greater flexibility to the rail network and provide future opportunities for further freight traffic from local firms and inward investors.

The line will also lay strong foundations on which other schemes, such as the station reopenings that have been spoken about, the Menstrie branch line and the important Rosyth freight link, can build. Some of those developments could not happen without the delivery of the project. The line will allow better and more efficient use of the busiest parts of the network and will support enhancements such as the Airdrie to Bathgate line and the Edinburgh airport rail link. Another benefit is a reduction in overcrowding on Fife services, and I could go on.

The scheme will have clear and definite benefits that we know that we can realise. In addition, the scheme will create huge new opportunities of which business and local communities can take advantage. That all adds up to a major project that has major potential.

**Dr Jackson:** I referred to the possible detrimental effect on current passenger and freight service timetables for the central route between Motherwell and Stirling. Will the minister give an assurance that he will ensure that no detrimental effect is created?

**Nicol Stephen:** I give Sylvia Jackson that assurance. As in the rest of Scotland, we seek to maintain and improve rail services to Stirling. I am convinced that we will achieve that. The scheme should in no way detract from services in any part of Scotland. More difficult schemes have been mentioned. Perhaps, in future, some schemes might involve trade-offs and might require consideration of the balance of convenience, but that is not the case with the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine railway, which will bring nothing but benefit to the rest of the rail network in Scotland.

On Tricia Marwick's point, I know that the promoter proposes that Network Rail should operate the line. Whatever views on Network Rail we have heard not only today but in previous debates on transport issues, we must acknowledge its expertise. The cost of establishing an alternative infrastructure operator and of securing and maintaining a rail safety case that Her Majesty's railway inspectorate could approve, for example, would be significant and would run to many millions.

For all the reasons that have been given, the Executive supports the scheme, which has major potential. The change will be to the benefit of Clackmannanshire and the national rail network.

I am not sure whether the Presiding Officer will be in the chair at decision time. Perhaps it would be tactically better if he were not, because I am sure that he will never have a greater temptation to press the green button to approve the bill's principles at 5 o'clock. I know that he has taken a keen interest in the bill. Indeed, when I was giving evidence, he was there to listen to the evidence that was being given to the committee. I know that the scheme is close to his heart. I also believe that it is a scheme that will be well supported by all the 129 MSPs in the Parliament.

16:50

**Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** We have heard many useful and informed speeches during the debate. I want to take the opportunity to respond to some of the points that have been raised. For those members who have taken a keen interest in the bill, it is important to realise that the thorough work that was done by the committee extends to giving answers to some of the points that have been raised—or at least I hope that it does.

I will first respond to the question of the need for a private bill. It stems from the Railway Clauses Consolidation (Scotland) Act 1845, which shows that rail is among the oldest forms of public transport. Indeed, given the methods for dealing with the creation and reopening of a railway in this day and age, cross-party effort to bring that about quickly would be welcomed by the committee and, I am sure, by all members.

The specific statutory authorisation of the bill is required because of the public or private nuisance that could arise and because the project involves the compulsory purchase of land. Several members raised that matter and it is important to clear it up at this point.

We are glad to hear from the minister that, alongside the private bill, consideration will be given to a link to Rosyth and on to Dunfermline, which was raised by several members. That link

would open up the north side of the Forth and I am sure that the committee would welcome it. Our remit, however, restricts us to dealing with the issues that are raised specifically in the bill.

I will add to the response that the minister made to Sylvia Jackson's question on the Motherwell to Stirling rail link. Network Rail's submission confirmed that careful timetable planning is anticipated on that link. Network Rail could see no reason why the addition of coal traffic along the route that the scheme proposes would have a detrimental effect on current passenger or freight timetables. The committee will keep that issue under consideration.

Scott Barrie asked about alternative routes in the Kincardine area. We should point out that, at the preliminary stage, the committee is concerned with the general principles of the bill. It is also concerned about the adequacy of the information that is provided by the promoter to allow it to undertake more detailed scrutiny at the consideration stage. The promoter commissioned the Kincardine bypass, the Clackmannan bypass and the Bogside alignment options. We limited our consideration to the methodology that had been employed by the promoter in commissioning those appraisals and did not examine the merits of each alternative. I know that that answer might not satisfy Scott Barrie, but he has options in the future.

Brian Monteith made points about compensation for members of the public who are affected. Negotiations over compensation claims are a matter for the promoter and for individual objectors. Any compensation disputes are a matter for the Scottish Land Court to resolve.

With regard to the biodiversity action plans and so forth, all the supplementary information is available in the public domain through the Parliament's website and, of course, through our partner libraries. I hope that members will commend the libraries to their constituents.

It is important to recognise at this stage that the MSP whose constituency is most affected by the bill—George Reid, the member for Ochil—could not participate in the debate because he is also the Presiding Officer. Mr Reid is in regular contact locally with the sponsor and the objectors. I confirm that Mr Reid has referred their concerns to the convener and me. Those concerns will be given full consideration if there is a positive preliminary stage vote tonight.

In those circumstances, I anticipate that the committee will thoroughly examine the needs case that has been put forward by Clackmannanshire Council that it will examine the objectors' concerns about compensation costs and the whole issue of sustainable development.

In reply to a specific question that was asked, I say that we are well aware that 55 objections cover more than 300 signatures and that that has been taken into consideration.

I will outline the next stages in the unique procedure that a private bill requires. The bill goes next to the consideration stage, which is the second of three stages in the process. The overall purpose of a consideration stage is to consider the detail of the bill. There are two distinct phases in that stage that are distinguished by the style of the proceedings. The first will involve the committee meeting in a quasi-judicial capacity to hear evidence on the bill and objections to it. The second will involve the committee meeting in a legislative capacity to consider and dispose of any amendments, some of which could arise as a result of the evidence considered on the objections. At the beginning of the first phase, the committee must agree from whom to invite evidence and whether to invite from each group oral evidence, written evidence or both.

The committee has only limited discretion about whom to invite. It must invite the promoter, but with objectors, the committee will first need to group those objections that it considers to be the same or similar and then for each group select one or more objectors to lead evidence on the group.

For the purpose of groupings, objections will normally be treated as similar only if they give similar reasons in opposition to similar aspects of the bill. That is important to note. That ensures that all legitimate arguments in respect of the bill are considered while avoiding unnecessary repetition. In relation to the remaining objections—those we cannot or choose not to group—we must invite to give evidence every objector whose interests we believe would be adversely affected by the bill.

As Bill Butler mentioned in his opening speech, 55 admissible objections to the bill were lodged, although 52 remain outstanding. Should the Parliament agree to the motion today, the committee will prepare a timetable for the hearing of evidence. We hope to start the process next week with our first consideration stage meeting, at which we intend to group the objections—assuming that the Parliament agrees to the motion on the financial resolution, which is down on the business programme for next Wednesday.

At consideration stage, the committee's role is to act as an arbiter between the promoter and the remaining objectors. That will involve allowing differences between the parties to be resolved by negotiation and, where that is not possible, choosing between them. [*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order. There is



now a level of conversation in the chamber that is affecting the ability of some members to hear what is being said. I would appreciate it if members would let the debate proceed.

**Rob Gibson:** We must ensure that each party has had a fair opportunity to present its own case and to question the opposing case. That might involve the leading of evidence and the cross-examination of witnesses and their evidence. That is a unique function of a private bill committee—the direct cross-examination of witnesses by non-members.

When that first phase has been completed, the committee will prepare a report giving its decisions on the objections considered, with reasons where appropriate. The report might also indicate areas where the committee expects the bill to be amended during the second phase of the consideration stage.

The debate has been worth while in highlighting some of the key aspects of the bill and, no doubt, the committee will consider some of those issues in much greater detail at the next stage. We received written evidence from the promoter and from 16 organisations. We heard oral evidence from 40 witnesses during our three evidence-gathering meetings in Alloa. The committee has been thorough in its approach to the preliminary stage and on that basis the committee has produced a fair, objective and thorough report.

In the light of the report of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill Committee, I invite Parliament to agree to the motion in the name of Bill Butler.

## Decision Time

17:00

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):** There are potentially five questions to be put as a result of today's business. I advise members that if amendment S2M-718.3, in the name of Peter Peacock, on reform of public services, is agreed to, amendment S2M-718.1, in the name of Shona Robison, and amendment S2M-718.2, in the name of Carolyn Leckie, will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S2M-718.3, in the name of Peter Peacock, which seeks to amend motion S2M-718, in the name of David McLetchie, on reform of public services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### FOR

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)

Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)  
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**AGAINST**

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)  
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

**ABSTENTIONS**

Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 64, Against 48, Abstentions 1.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Therefore, amendment S2M-718.1, in the name of Shona Robison, and amendment S2M-718.2, in the name of Carolyn Leckie, fall.

The next question is, that motion S2M-718, in the name of David McLetchie, on reform of public services, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**FOR**

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McMahan, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)

Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)  
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

#### AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)  
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)  
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)  
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)  
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)  
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 62, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the Parliament supports the radical, demanding and relevant agenda set out in *A Partnership for a Better Scotland* including the delivery of excellent public services that put patients, pupils and victims first, ensure equality of access across urban and rural Scotland, devolve decision-making to frontline staff, establish national standards on which local excellence can be built, backed by inspection, and share best practice and action to tackle and turn around poor performance.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S2M-711, in the name of Bill Butler, on the general principles of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill and that the Bill should proceed as a Private Bill.

## Speed Limits around Schools

### The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-615, in the name of Bill Butler, on 20mph speed zones around schools. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

#### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament congratulates Glasgow City Council on its decision to introduce mandatory 20 mph speed limits outside every school in Glasgow; hopes that other local authorities will follow Glasgow City Council's example in trying to improve the safety of pupils travelling to and from school, and views this as a significant and welcome step in implementing the Scottish Executive's commitment to improve Scotland's record on road traffic accidents, in particular the objective of cutting the number of young people killed and injured on roads each year.

17:04

**Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab):** I begin by thanking the many members from all parties and from no party who supported my members' business motion. The widespread support for the motion demonstrates the importance to all our constituents of a measure that, in my experience, has been warmly welcomed by parents, pupils, teachers and the wider community.

I decided to lodge the motion in response to the publication on Tuesday 18 November of Glasgow City Council's plans to ensure that all 258 schools in the city—primary schools, secondary schools and special needs schools—are located within a 20mph speed zone.

Glasgow City Council has taken that decision because results of a Scotland-wide pilot study showed a positive public response to specific mandatory regulation. I applaud Glasgow's commitment to employ the measure with the laudable objective of cutting the number of injuries sustained by Glasgow pupils travelling to and from school.

As members will know, the background to the 20mph speed zone scheme is the Scottish Executive's ambitious road safety target, which was reiterated by the Minister for Transport in September. He stated:

"The Executive is committed to cutting the number of deaths and injuries on our roads"

and aims

"to halve the number of children killed and seriously injured by 2010."

I am positive that 20mph speed zones in and around schools will play a significant part in meeting that objective.

The scheme in Glasgow will be funded to the tune of £4 million, which is Glasgow's share of the welcome £27 million of funding announced by Mr Nicol Stephen that is to be used nationwide over the next three years to introduce 20mph speed zones.

The introduction of specific mandatory speed limits makes a difference in reducing the number of accidents involving young people. The Executive's figures show that 20mph zones and traffic-calming measures can reduce child pedestrian accidents by 70 per cent and child cyclist accidents by 60 per cent. That positive finding was corroborated by three separate pilot projects for lower speed limits around schools that were held in the Maryhill, Cardonald and Springburn areas of Glasgow. The pilot projects served to reinforce the effectiveness of lower speed limits in cutting the number of accidents.

The councillor for the Cardonald ward on Glasgow City Council, Alistair Watson—a former colleague of mine—is on record as saying that

"20 mph speed limits were successfully pioneered in Glasgow"

and he expresses pleasure that they are now to be "rolled out to schools across Scotland."

I believe that 20mph speed limits will make the roads safer not only for young people but for other road users. As members will know, our schools are largely located in residential areas, so the scheme will also have a positive effect on all pedestrians and cyclists within those areas.

I know from speaking to my constituents that Glasgow City Council's plans have been warmly received. I recently visited Summerhill Primary School in Drumchapel to talk about the scheme with the head teacher, Mrs Buist, and with pupils and staff. I was delighted by their enthusiastic response and their knowledge of the scheme.

In another area of my Glasgow Anniesland constituency, Blairdardie, local residents—with the active support of their local councillor, Steven Purcell—have campaigned relentlessly for the introduction of improved road safety measures at Blairdardie Primary School. I am pleased to hear that plans to introduce a 20mph limit have been agreed and will be implemented in the next financial year.

I take the opportunity afforded by the debate to mention the part played by the Drumchapel social inclusion partnership, and many other SIPs throughout Scotland, in promoting several initiatives to push the road safety message and to address specific stretches of road that have proven to be prone to road traffic accidents.

It is unfortunate and totally unacceptable that people in the poorest, most disadvantaged groups in society are the most likely to be involved in an accident. There is a real link between restricted access to employment, education, good-quality housing and amenities and an increased likelihood of injury and death caused by a road accident.

It is my conviction that social inclusion partnerships have a role in breaking that link. The children's road safety project that the Drumchapel SIP runs aims to educate young people about road safety. I believe that SIPs have a key role to play in educating people and promoting the road safety message among community organisations, schools and youth groups.

As well as playing a role in education, Drumchapel SIP has—in conjunction with Glasgow City Council—implemented physical improvements to local accident spots and put in place traffic-calming measures. One example of that is a number of road improvements that have been made on Garscadden Road, at the entrance to the new Donald Dewar leisure centre. Those measures have improved the safety of the footpath and increased the safety of pedestrians who use the sports centre, many of whom are young people.

Providing a safe and secure environment in which young people can travel to and from school will mean additional benefits, apart from the obvious one of reducing the number of young people who are killed and injured on Scotland's roads. For example, making it easier to walk to school will help to tackle the problem of inactivity and lack of exercise among Scotland's young people.

The chamber will be aware that NHS Quality Improvement Scotland's recent clinical outcome indicators report highlights the gravely concerning physical condition of an increasing number of our young people. For example, one in 10 Scottish children aged 12 are classified as obese and one in three are classified as overweight. For that reason, I was pleased to hear the First Minister at last week's First Minister's question time stress the importance of walking in making a significant contribution to the nation's exercise habits and the fight against obesity.

In conclusion, I again commend Glasgow City Council and other local authorities that have come forward with plans to implement 20mph speed limits around our schools. I hope that other local authorities that have set time scales for such schemes will implement the appropriate measures as expeditiously as possible. It is important that we improve—and continue to improve—road safety.

The number of young people killed and injured on our roads has fallen recently, but it is still

unacceptably high. Twenty miles per hour zones are not a panacea that will eradicate injuries and deaths on our roads overnight; however, along with the improved education of our young people and joint working among the agencies involved—the Executive, local authorities, SIPs, the police and community organisations—they will play a significant part in developing practical methods of improving road safety within our local communities. I welcome the zones, as I am sure do all members in the chamber.

17:11

**Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** I congratulate Bill Butler on securing this very important debate on an issue that affects not just all of us in the chamber, but our constituents and their children. At this point, I should mention Rosie Kane, who also put her name to this motion on 20mph speed zones. The Parliament sends its best wishes to Rosie, who I am sure would have been here to speak in the debate had she felt well enough to do so.

Bill Butler referred to Glasgow City Council. As someone who has at times sparred with its representatives, I should take this opportunity to congratulate the council—and in particular my long-time political sparring partner, Alistair Watson—on all the hard work that has been carried out not just in Cardonald but throughout the local authority area.

Glasgow City Council has been successful in the vigorous way that it has pursued this matter and I hope that the introduction of 20mph speed zones around schools will be rolled out throughout the country. However, I am worried that money will be concentrated only on zones surrounding schools and will not be allocated to areas in and around hospitals and to housing schemes that are located slightly away from schools. I know that members are always asking for more money, but I must ask the minister whether, in addition to the £4 million that has been allocated, there will be any more money to extend the 20mph speed limit to other residential areas and housing schemes.

I realise that members will talk about their own areas. Bill Butler mentioned Anniesland, but there are many other areas within Glasgow city. For example, people assume that, because Townhead and Garnethill are in the city centre, there are no children there. I assure members that many kids live in those areas. Indeed, people seem to forget that Townhead, which is sometimes used as a rat-run, is actually a housing scheme. As a result, I am glad to see that a 20mph speed zone has been introduced for a school in that area. However, people simply zoom through other parts of Townhead to get on to the motorway. In that respect, I must pay tribute to Glasgow City Council

for its decision to introduce speed bumps in that area.

People do not realise that the Garnethill area at the top of Sauchiehall Street contains nursery, primary and secondary schools. Because so much is going on in the city centre, they tend to take their cars up into the area around the Glasgow School of Art. Anyone who has walked up Rose Street and the aptly named Hill Street will know that those streets are very steep and unfortunately cars sometimes come speeding down them. I hope the minister will also comment on that particular issue.

As I said earlier, I congratulate Bill Butler on lodging his motion, and I also congratulate Glasgow City Council on being at the forefront of pushing the 20mph zones. However, I would like the initiative to be extended, and I hope that the minister can give us some assurances that there will be more money to extend the zones, not just to roads outside schools but to roads outside hospitals and to roads in residential areas, which sometimes become a bit of a rat-run. The kids in residential areas need protection as well.

17:15

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** I take the opportunity to speak in tonight's very welcome debate led by Bill Butler partly because my colleague, Glasgow regional member Bill Aitken, who I am sure would have wished to speak in the debate, is incapacitated, as many members know. At the moment, he is confined to following the Parliament's proceedings from his living room. I am sure that, just as Sandra White wished Rosie Kane well, we would also wish Bill Aitken well and hope that he is soon back among us. Bill Aitken also had a long tradition of sparring within and without Glasgow City Council, but I know that the 20mph zones are an initiative that he would very much welcome.

From my 14 years of working in and around Glasgow city centre, I know how much traffic to and from school impacts on the traffic flows in the city. At the end of his speech, Bill Butler made an important point about the need to encourage a wider debate—not necessarily a political debate—about transportation to and from school. Anybody who has used the Kingston bridge knows that the biggest single factor that has an impact on traffic there is whether the schools are in session. We must consider initiatives to encourage people to walk to school, because there is no doubt that the number of accidents in and around schools is affected by the volume of traffic that we see round schools in the morning.

I am a personal supporter of the view that we should consider differential speed limits, which is

another issue that is worthy of debate. We have a very general approach to speed limits in this country. If a road has a specific designation and meets certain strict criteria, it gets one speed limit. If it meets other criteria it gets another speed limit, which does not take local criteria into account. I am sure that we have all seen sections of dual carriageway where we are asked to drive at 30mph, while on other roads that appear to be adjacent to residential properties, schools or hospitals, the general speed limits apply.

I very much support the proposals that have been floated by my Westminster colleague, Peter Duncan MP, to examine further the possibilities of differential speed limits, so that the speed limit reflects more closely local road conditions. If road users respected the speed limits that they were being asked to observe, differential speed limits might, as part of a general approach, encourage them to adhere more closely to the limits, which is the ultimate objective.

Sandra White mentioned housing areas. We want to encourage the police and other enforcement agencies to focus more of their efforts on speeding and other infringements of road traffic legislation in and around housing areas. I appreciate that it is easy and straightforward to sit on a motorway bridge with a speed camera and clock people going underneath, but a more focused use of police resources and a greater police presence in some residential areas would be helpful.

I have much pleasure in supporting Bill Butler's motion.

17:19

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** Bill Butler dealt very well with the issue of the 20mph speed limit, and he is to be congratulated on bringing it forward. The toll of death and injury to our young people is a great blot on Scottish life and we must attack it in different ways. The 20mph limit is obviously one good way of doing so, but I will mention some of the others, and I hope that the minister will be able to tell us how well we are progressing. On some of them, I ask him to co-operate with his colleagues in education, housing and communities.

I was one of the members who managed to get the concept of home zones included in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001, which we passed in the previous session of Parliament. Home zones have a role to play. The idea of the home zone is to make the streets in a particular area friendly to people rather than to vehicles—either through putting in place physical measures or through creating an atmosphere—and to reclaim the streets for people. A generation ago, lots of

children played in the street, but now it is much more dangerous for them to do so and their parents often keep them at home, so the development of the home zones concept would fit well with the introduction of 20mph speed limits. I hope that the Executive encourages councils to set up trial home zones.

There are various aspects to getting to school in a more socially acceptable way, by cycling, for example, or by using a walking bus—although the configuration of catchment areas obviously means that those do not suit every school. The walking-bus system suits some schools, however; I took part in one and was very impressed by it.

To encourage children to cycle to school, we need to put in place physical measures on the route and at the school and we need to educate children, their parents and motorists. In my experience, in particular as a councillor, a lot of the trouble is caused by parents, some of whom park at schools in quite the most selfish manner and cause a lot of trouble to all and sundry. We must educate parents to behave in a civilised way.

All those measures, added together, can start to create a better climate in which to get our young people to school in a safe and healthy way. That will improve our communities, because if young people use their energies sensibly, by walking or cycling to school, they are less likely to cause trouble.

At the annual general meeting of 6VT—the Edinburgh city youth café on Victoria Terrace—I was introduced to breakdancing, which I recommend as an amazing way for young people to work off their energies without hurting one another. Breakdancing is probably not something that comes under the Minister for Transport's remit—

**The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen):** May we have a demonstration?

**Donald Gorrie:** No, I will spare members that.

The motion contains some very good points. We should draw up a scheme to encourage more civilised and safe ways of travelling to school and I hope that the minister will consider those ideas.

17:23

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** As well as my responsibilities as a member of the Scottish Parliament, on Fridays I usually have the responsibility of being the walking bus—if I may use that phrase. I walk with half a dozen children from my street to the local primary school and I am conscious of my responsibility as I note the speed of the cars that go by.

West Lothian Council has introduced 20mph speed limits in a number of areas, particularly in villages. Indeed I think that it might have done so before Glasgow City Council, but I will not be picky about the dates.

When the minister announced the very welcome money to support the introduction of 20mph speed limits, I was not sure to what extent councils that had already introduced such speed limits off their own backs and without Executive funding would be compensated. I would like the minister to address that point, which raises a central issue about the extent to which the Parliament should dictate what local authorities do. If local authorities are capable of coming up with good ideas and practices themselves, should they not be given the resources that would allow them to make decisions, rather than be allocated ring-fenced money, however welcome that might be? That is a general point that is not just about transport but about the issues that the Parliament has to address.

On 8 October when the minister announced the £27 million for local authorities, he said that the money was for the introduction of 20mph speed limits. My understanding is that there are three different types of measure that local authorities can bring in. The first type are mandatory 20mph speed zones, which have particular criteria including traffic-calming measures and for which the police's support must be obtained. The second type are mandatory 20mph speed limits, which are different and include different speed measures. In the second category, the speed below which 85 per cent of vehicles travel should be less than or equal to 24mph. There do not necessarily have to be traffic-calming measures. The third type includes a legally enforceable speed limit of 30mph, for which the support of local residents is crucial.

The Executive's announcement was about speed limits, not about speed zones, which are the most stringent measure. I would like clarification of what the Executive expects local authorities to introduce, because there is quite a lot of difference between speed limits and speed zones. If the speed limits are just advisory—the third type of measure—that can be problematic. I refer to the experience of West Lothian Council, because it is probably more advanced in implementing its zones than are other authorities. We might have to address what action is required, because people do not have to pay attention and at 20 minutes to 9 in the morning, the police are not necessarily out monitoring or enforcing the measures. Therefore I am not convinced that the speed limits will have the impact that we want them to have—we have to be conscious of that. They can make a visual impact, as people driving past the school are made aware that they have to slow down. I seek

clarification from the minister on the three different categories.

It is interesting to note that whereas in 1972, 111 child pedestrians in Scotland were killed and 2,500 were seriously injured, in 2002 only 14 were killed—that is an improvement, but it is still 14 too many—but still more than 2,000 were injured. We must address those statistics, because even one life is worth the measures.

We are obviously conscious of the role of lollipop men, and we should acknowledge the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the introduction of lollipop men and women. When I walk to school in my walking bus on a Friday morning, I meet the two Ronnies. They are not the comedians that we know from the television, but they certainly are cheerful and they give children confidence in walking to school on their own, which is important. We should put our thanks to them on the record.

17:27

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I welcome the debate and support the motion. The introduction of 20mph zones for Glasgow schools is a welcome development. The twenty's plenty signs that I saw when I was learning to drive a couple of years ago are starting to become a familiar sight. It has been shown that even small speed reductions have an important part to play in reducing the incidence and severity of injuries and the risk of death when accidents occur.

I echo some of Donald Gorrie's comments that we can take further steps. The Greens have been banging on about the concept of home zones for a number of years. We have to recognise that speed bumps and flashing lights on their own are not enough. We need to take a broader view of road safety and implement other measures, such as a country-wide adoption of such home zones. The home-zone principle is about giving communities, that have been given over little by little to the car, back to the children and adults who live there. That principle requires the further courageous step of not just 20mph zones but 10mph zones.

The partnership agreement between Labour and the Liberal Democrats includes a commitment to support the development of home zones, which is hugely welcome. We often criticise the Executive for all its little green trees, but we genuinely support that one. However, it is sad that, as far as I am aware, only four home zones are being piloted in Scotland; we really want to see that moved on.

Turning streets into valuable public spaces that are an asset, rather than just gaps between buildings, involves a mixture of legal and physical barriers, sanctions or interventions, such as traffic-calming measures, trees and bushes, seating or

play areas and clear signage. In Glasgow, too many of our small parks and play areas are being swallowed up by housing developments, all of which add more car parking spaces. Streets that are already congested are getting worse. I hope and trust that the Executive will take the benefits of home zones seriously.

We have to consider other issues—not only to do with how we design our streets and urban communities, or to do with zones and speed limits, but to do with traffic levels. We have continually talked about the demand for traffic reduction targets. By 2020, Glasgow will have seen a 40 per cent increase in road traffic levels, according to the Scottish Executive's figures. That increase is bigger than the Scottish Executive's own "do nothing" model. Despite all the interventions, developments, changes and policies that the Executive is bringing in, we are seeing a bigger increase in road traffic. That will inevitably mean a higher incidence of road accidents, whatever the speed limits and whatever the urban design. If we want to reduce road traffic deaths by 2010, we will have to consider where we will be by 2020, when the streets will be far busier. People have to have genuine choices. If the roads are still busy, or if they are perceived to be unsafe, people will still get in their cars to take the kids to school. If it is cars that cause the danger and the fear, we need to change the culture. That will never be easy, but the only way to guarantee that we fail to achieve it will be not to try to achieve it.

There is an implicit admission in Glasgow City Council's welcome and positive step: road traffic dangers must be addressed. They must be addressed everywhere, not only outside schools.

17:31

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** I would like to add my congratulations to Bill Butler on bringing such an important topic to the chamber. The heading for this debate should probably be, "credit where credit is due". I and others in the chamber will continue to have political differences with Glasgow City Council because of some of the things that it does or does not do; but, in this instance, Glasgow City Council deserves 100 per cent credit for being a trail-blazer with its 20mph speed limits.

A scheme has been tried and monitored in my street in Glasgow—Paisley Road West—outside Lourdes Secondary School and Lourdes Primary School. The 20mph zone is not applied all the time, but it is applied at the important school times. The monitoring has shown almost overwhelming acceptance of the 20mph zone when it is applied. That is very important. Drivers are recognising the need for increased vigilance and road safety during the peak times when schools are going in



or coming out, and during lunch times. The scheme has already been very successful and it will contribute to making the roads around the schools—and therefore the children—safer.

Glasgow City Council deserves credit for many things—Bill Butler and I had the shared pleasure of serving on it for 11 long years. The council has come forward with a number of initiatives. It was the first to introduce free fruit, the first to introduce free breakfasts, and the first to introduce free school meals for primary school children. Just as I hope that the 20mph zones will be introduced across the whole of Scotland, I hope that free lunches—at least for primary school children, minister—will be introduced too. In the previous session of Parliament, the minister opposed that; I hope that he will not oppose the rolling out of the 20mph zones.

I hope that the minister will tell us tonight, one, that he welcomes what Glasgow is doing and, two, that he will be more proactive in writing to local authorities and getting involved in as much publicity as possible, trying to show what can be achieved when a local authority decides to take this idea on board. It would be beneficial if we were able to say that all Scottish schools were willing to adopt these zones as significant road safety measures.

I hope that Bill Butler does not mind, but I want to add one small sour note. In Glasgow, a primary school closure programme is under way. The worry is that, as part of that programme, many community schools face closure. Literally hundreds of primary school children will have much a longer journey to their schools. Many of them will have to use buses for that journey and others will have to walk greater distances. That slightly undermines the promotion of increased road safety for school children and I hope that Glasgow City Council will be extremely cautious in its thinking about the closure of any of those schools.

I look forward to the minister not only supporting what Glasgow is doing, but giving an indication that the 20mph concept will also be proactively promoted in housing estates and schemes.

17:35

**Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD):** As many members have said, this is an important subject. I will focus on the second part of the motion. I hope that other local authorities across Scotland—particularly Edinburgh, from my point of view—will follow Glasgow's good example.

Having 20mph zones outside schools is an effective way of reducing the numbers of severe casualties. Fiona Hyslop and Bill Butler mentioned statistics that I do not mind emphasising.

Research shows that, in areas with 20mph zones, injuries have fallen by 60 per cent, child pedestrian accidents by 70 per cent and child accidents by 48 per cent. That success is excellent for Glasgow and other parts of Scotland. I am pleased that, as far back as 2001, Edinburgh City Council had plans to place 20mph zones around schools and was part of the initial successful trials. Six schemes have been built that involve traffic-calming measures and/or flashing temporary speed signs and I understand that a considerable number of others are in the pipeline.

The £2.15 million that the Executive announced in September for Edinburgh will enable many other schools across Edinburgh to be included in the scheme. I am encouraged that, over the next three years, there is a possibility that all schools in Edinburgh will have 20mph zones around them. Clearly, that will have an impact on the number of casualties. I will continue to press for as many of those schemes as possible to be implemented as soon as possible.

The 20mph zones will make areas safer and will encourage parents to allow their children to walk or cycle to school. One of the main problems in relation to the matter that we are discussing is parents insisting on driving their children to school. We need to encourage parents to stop taking cars to schools. That must be done in conjunction with other measures to reduce traffic around schools. There is no use in the speed limit being 20mph if there is indiscriminate and dangerous nose-to-tail parking in the area.

Children cannot cross the road safely and I would like some of the available money to be used to fund dedicated bus services. In my constituency, St Peter's Primary School near Tollcross had to move to temporary premises while the school building was rebuilt. There is a huge problem with parking in the area and I agree with Donald Gorrie that most of that problem is caused by the parents insisting on driving their kids to school. Walking buses, which we heard about earlier, are extremely successful and we should encourage more schools to get involved in that initiative.

The Executive is to be commended for making £43 million available to local authorities over the next three years to fund safer school projects, 20mph speed limits and other safety projects. It is up to all councils to follow Glasgow's lead and introduce the 20mph schemes at all schools, while not forgetting other measures to cut traffic.

17:39

**Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I commend Glasgow City Council for the work that it

has been undertaking to improve safety around schools.

From my experience of working on a particular case with Falkirk Council, I know that it has a rolling programme of safety around schools that involves traffic calming, safer routes to school and twenty's plenty zones.

All councils in Scotland should be encouraged to do whatever they can to ensure that roads around schools are as safe as possible. However, it is important that we ensure that councils have the funding to carry out the important work of promoting road safety.

I will raise two issues. In September last year, Cathie Craigie secured a debate on road safety. In the course of that debate, I highlighted the tragic case of a 15-year-old girl called Kathleen Fitzpatrick, who was killed not at school, but on the way home from school. She disembarked from the school bus, went round the back of the bus, went to cross the road, was knocked down by a heavy goods truck and subsequently died as a result of her injuries. We need to address not only safety immediately around schools, but to consider the wider issues of children's safety on their way home, whether they walk or go home on school transport.

I hope that the minister will consider what further measures can be taken, such as whether vehicles should not be allowed to overtake school buses while children are disembarking, as is the case in North America and some other places, which might go some way to reducing the risk to children on their way home. When I was on holiday in the Basque Country this year, I was impressed by the fact that, if a vehicle that is approaching a small village or town is exceeding the speed limit, a set of traffic lights comes on automatically and stops the vehicle from entering the area, so that it is not speeding when goes into the built-up area. Perhaps something such as that would be useful in certain situations in Scotland.

The second issue that I will raise with the minister diverges slightly from the debate and relates to drivers who are disqualified from driving. We can do a lot to make the roads safer for kids by introducing twenty's plenty zones and other measures to reduce traffic speed. However, I went through the Executive's statistics for drivers who are disqualified by the courts in Scotland and I noticed that, although some 23,000 drivers were disqualified in 1996, that dropped to just under 20,000 by 2000 and the percentage of disqualified drivers who were arrested for driving while disqualified rose to 22 per cent. Some 4,500 people in Scotland who have been disqualified from driving continue to drive daily. If we are to promote road safety, it is crucial that those who have been disqualified from driving because of

their driving behaviour are kept off the roads. I hope that the minister will discuss the matter with his colleagues in the Justice Department and consider what can be done to address the issue so that bad or dangerous drivers do not put children and other road users at risk by continuing to drive while disqualified.

17:43

**The Minister for Transport (Nicol Stephen):** I am pleased to respond to the debate. I thank Bill Butler for lodging the motion and congratulate him on his stamina for also having opened the preliminary stage debate on the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine Railway and Linked Improvements Bill.

Members have mentioned Glasgow City Council's dynamism and success in introducing mandatory 20mph speed limits outside all its schools. I would like a similar approach to be taken in all Scotland's 32 local authorities, and I am happy to support all the points in Bill Butler's motion.

Mike Pringle mentioned the huge impact that 20mph zones have had on child safety statistics and the real successes that there have been in reducing serious incidents involving the injury or death of a child. We have set an ambitious target of halving by 2010 the number of children who are killed or seriously injured on Scotland's roads, compared with the average for 1994-98, and we have already made significant progress. The statistics show that, in 2002, child deaths and serious injuries were 38 per cent below the level of the mid-1990s.

I understand Patrick Harvie's concerns about there being an increased number of cars on the roads. We have to do everything that we can to reduce that number. However, it does not necessarily follow that more traffic equals more accidents, as we have seen exactly the reverse. There has been more traffic over the past 10 years, but we have managed to reduce the number of accidents. Measures such as those that we are discussing tonight can make a big impact. If they can change driver behaviour and gain the support of local communities and people, they can make a tremendous difference.

More needs to be done, however, and I do not wish for one second to be seen to be complacent on the issue. Journeys to school should be the very safest journeys for children and parents. I am a parent who tries to take my children to school, although, sadly, I am in my home city only once a week. On Fridays, I always try to walk with my children to school and I know how eventful those journeys can be. There is always the potential for incident and I know how worrying and chaotic the traffic situation can be, despite twenty's plenty

signs, yellow zig-zag markings outside schools and all the other measures that can be put in place. We must do everything that we can to encourage young people and parents to undertake that walk or cycle journey to school, and we need to create the best possible environment to encourage that.

I still remember from my young days the tragic death of a child who was walking to school in the village where I lived, just outside Aberdeen. The accident happened not immediately beside the school but some way away from it, and involved the child of the local policeman, who lived just a few hundreds yards away from where his son was killed. That memory, and the shock that ripples through the school and the community when there is an incident of that sort, has always remained with me.

The big message that we should be driving home tonight is that we really can make a difference. The £27 million of funding that has been announced for the next three years can make a huge impact. Schemes such as those that we are discussing cost about £10,000 to £20,000 a time. Road safety issues can be tackled, and 20mph zones can be introduced outside a huge number of Scotland's schools—indeed, they are to be introduced at well over 1,000 schools in the initial three-year phase. I am determined that we should be able to make an impact outside every school in Scotland.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Is the £27 million that has been announced intended to allow local authorities to choose to set up mandatory zones, mandatory speed limits or advisory speed limits? What is the money actually for?

**Nicol Stephen:** There is discretion, which goes wider than those options. In my letter to local authorities, however, I wanted to give emphasis to 20mph zones. It would be unfair to compel those authorities that have already made significant progress to ring fence the money, so the money may be used for other safety zone measures—for example, for home zone measures. Authorities that have made significant progress can spend the money in other ways, but I do not want to let off the hook the authorities that have not been making such an investment or to reduce the pressure on them to make progress. Tommy Sheridan was absolutely right in that regard. We must be proactive and sell the message about the significant improvements that can be made.

I will not go through all the different options that are detailed in front of me. They involve mandatory schemes, either with or without engineering measures, and they may be applicable either throughout the day or temporarily, with a speed limit that can change. There can also be advisory zones. Evidence

shows that there is huge support in communities for any and all of those measures, and that drivers pay attention to them.

We used pilot schemes to find out what the impact of the measures would be. We can never be quite sure what driver behaviour will be—whether drivers will respect the 20mph limits—or what the impact of a scheme will be. That was particularly important in relation to speed limits that vary in the course of the day. Do drivers slow down for the half hour, or whatever the period is, during which children arrive at or leave school? All the evidence is that drivers obey the speed limits and that the schemes are successful. The trials showed the effectiveness of the new signs, and it is therefore entirely appropriate for us to spread best practice and roll out the schemes to other parts of Scotland. Glasgow City Council was one of the trail-blazers—one of the five local authorities that proved that the 20mph limit is effective.

We must now deal with the roads on which the speed limit is higher than 30mph. We want to find out how to reduce the speed through trials and the testing of different methods. I was interested in what Michael Matheson said about what goes on in the Basque Country. We need to examine best practice in different parts of the world. It might be entirely feasible to adopt Michael Matheson's suggestion in some of our rural villages, where it is necessary to bring down the speed from 60mph to 20mph over quite a short distance, because there is a school that is close to the edge of the village. Such innovative projects are well worth considering. I would support any local authority that had a sensible or appropriate pilot scheme for dealing with areas in which the speed limit is higher than 30mph.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I do not know whether the minister is aware that new school transport guidelines were issued only a few months ago. When the Education committee examined the guidelines, it was concerned to find that there did not seem to be much joined-up thinking between the Education Department and the Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department, or much innovative thinking, such as that which Michael Matheson gave an example of. Will the minister give a commitment to reconsider the school transport guidelines to ensure that we embrace some of that innovative thinking?

**Nicol Stephen:** I am happy that we do that. As a constituency MSP, I have made representations on such issues. In some areas, we run up against the fact that some such matters are reserved—for example, I am told that, under the current devolution settlement, the school bus overtaking issue would have to be tackled by the Westminster Parliament. We must consider whether such an initiative would be as effective here as it is in North

America, where there has been a long tradition of vehicles stopping to allow the school bus to drop off its pupils and to move on again, rather than overtaking it. The traffic in America respects that, but I would be very concerned if a young person started to assume that the traffic would stop, as that could be dangerous.

We recognise the merit in what Michael Matheson says and, in time, such schemes will be worth promoting in Scotland. The issue is about getting solid support—from the public, from communities and from drivers—for the new schemes. We must make progress on that, but the funding is there, so we are in a good position to make significant strides forward throughout Scotland. Some authorities have already made significant progress.

I understand that the message is that such schemes cannot be delivered overnight; it is not simply a question of erecting signs, because mandatory limits require the promotion of speed-limit orders by the relevant traffic authority and there has to be appropriate consultation with the police and other road-user interests. It is also necessary to publish proposals and consider any objections before the installation process can begin. Glasgow City Council has got off to a tremendous start.

Although each scheme must be considered carefully, we must be strong and supportive in driving forward the whole initiative, because each scheme is vital for the school and the community involved. I am determined to make real progress as quickly as possible and to ensure that the £27 million funding is used effectively to make our roads, our streets, our pavements and our routes to school safer for young people in Scotland.

*Meeting closed at 17:54.*

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