

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 26 January 2010

Session 3

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TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE **2nd Meeting 2010, Session 3**

CONVENER

*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)

*Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD)

*Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP)

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

◇Phillip Darnton (Cycling England)

Karen Furey (Scottish Government Transport Directorate)

Kirsty Lewin (Scottish Government Transport Directorate)

Stewart Stevenson (Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change)

◇by video link

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Alastair Macfie

ASSISTANT CLERK

Clare O'Neill

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee

Tuesday 26 January 2010

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Patrick Harvie): Good afternoon, everybody. I welcome you all to the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee's second meeting this year. I remind everybody that all mobile devices should be switched off. We have no apologies to record.

The first of the seven agenda items is a proposal to take items in private. We recommend taking in private items 5 to 7 today and any future consideration of draft reports on our active travel inquiry. Do members agree?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Active Travel Inquiry

14:00

The Convener: Item 2 is the continuation of our active travel inquiry with our final oral evidence session. First, we will hear from a representative of Cycling England via videolink from London. Following that, we will hear from the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson.

Members know that the audio from London has a slight delay. I am sure that we will live with and allow for that, to ensure that the discussion is reasonably smooth. I remind members to try not to speak over one another, as that is rather confusing at the other end.

I welcome to the meeting—albeit remotely—our first witness, who is Phillip Darnton, Cycling England's chairman. Thank you for taking time to answer our questions.

The first questions are general. For committee members' benefit, will you explain what Cycling England's role is? What is its relationship with the Department for Transport? Any brief opening remarks that you want to add would be appropriate, too.

Phillip Darnton (Cycling England): Good afternoon. Thank you for accepting this conversation over videolink.

Cycling England was established by the Department for Transport in spring 2005. Formally, it is a non-departmental public body, which means that it has no powers or authority to let contracts or agree grants. All the financial aspects of Cycling England's work are managed directly through the Department for Transport and its legal, procurement and letting processes.

Cycling England's title is profound, but the group is modest. It comprises me and three colleagues—formally, that is Cycling England. As an NDPB, we are surprisingly cost effective. Our overhead cost is about 0.25 per cent of the budget. We work virtually and have no office—we hot desk as necessary from the Department for Transport. We see ourselves as independent from and in no sense constrained by the department. However, the fact is that the department is our paymaster. As far as is humanly possible, we work in parallel at all times and particularly in public-facing matters.

Cycling England has a board of eight members, which I chair. The secretary of state selected those eight back in 2005. When our position as a non-departmental public body was renewed in 2008, the board members' positions on the board were renewed, too. Three of the members are the

chief executives of the major charities: Sustrans, the Cyclists Touring Club and British Cycling. The other members represent aspects of cycling, so we have Dr Alison Hill, who heads the National Obesity Observatory, as our board member with a particular interest in cycling and health. Likewise, we have a local councillor from York, who has expertise on cycling and local authorities. We have someone whose role in a London borough is in social and youth services, and who is therefore our link into education. We have a journalist and agent provocateur, and we have a freelance who works for a business called Transport for Quality of Life and who sits on the board of the Commission for Integrated Transport in London.

The board members give their services free, on a pro bono basis, and meet for about half a day about five times a year. In the meantime, my colleagues and I work closely with the Department for Transport to get a programme of work carried out. I would be happy to say a little more about that programme of work if you wish, but perhaps you would prefer me to pause so that you can ask questions.

The Convener: The first specific issue that we would like to explore is the cycling city, cycling towns programme. It would be helpful if you could summarise its development and implementation.

Phillip Darnton: Right. Cycling England's initial funding from the DFT was £5 million. We had put together a proposal for a substantially higher amount, which the secretary of state at the time was unable to accept. Given that we had a very small budget, we agreed with the department that it would be important to use the money in a way that showed that cycling could grow if it was properly invested in.

The history of cycling in England is that, certainly over the past 30 and perhaps the past 35 years, cycling rates for everyday cycling—I am talking about short urban trips—have declined steadily and inexorably. Our hypothesis was that given the investment in cycling in European cities, in many cases continuously since 1973, one would expect that the provision of similar levels of investment in England would mean that cycling would start to grow again. We recommended that, rather than continue with a spend that, if averaged out across the country, amounted to about 70p per head of population, we should follow the hypothesis that the provision of European levels of investment of about £10 per head of population would make a difference to cycling levels fairly quickly. Our remit is entirely about short urban trips; it is not about sport, long-distance cycling or off-road cycling. Our funding comes almost exclusively from the DFT, whose objectives are, ultimately, to do with congestion and pollution—hence the focus on short urban trips.

Given that we had a limited budget, we wrote to local authorities to ask them whether they would be interested in making bids for funding from Cycling England for a programme of work in their towns that they would define and which would be looked at by a group of people from Cycling England. Each bid took the form of an application that had to be signed by the local authority's chief executive and by the leader or portfolio holder, because our core belief—which we think has been shown to be correct over the past five years—is that a combination of competent leadership and extremely determined political will is essential if we are to make the behaviour change that we are trying to achieve.

We received about 30 applications from a total of about 140 local authorities that could have applied. I should say that our remit does not extend to London, which is separately financed, managed and governed, so the authorities in question were from outside London.

We shortlisted 10 towns and chose towns, by and large, with populations of about 100,000 people because we could not see a way of tackling any larger towns with the budget that we had. We visited the 10 towns and met officials, local authority cabinet members and local people. We spent at least a day in each of the towns and came to a view that we recorded carefully against a well-understood selection procedure. We chose six towns and have been working with them ever since.

The agreement was that Cycling England would provide funding of £5 per head of population and the local authority or county council would provide match funding of a further £5, thus providing £10 per head of population. We have tried to ensure that each town has a very clear view of what it is trying to achieve and that it has documented that, year by year, in its work plans. Our role has been both to encourage and to ask questions of a fairly straightforward nature such as, "Why do you want to put a cycle lane there?", "How are you tackling cycling to school?", "What about this hospital?" and "How about that station?" We are trying to ensure that the programme of work that—

The Convener: I would like to move us on, if I may. I am a little concerned that members may not have time to ask all the questions that they would like to ask. Can you wind up your comments by indicating the success in modal share that has been achieved under the programme?

Phillip Darnton: Of course. I will make five quick points.

We have monitored carefully the first three years' work of all six towns, and the results have just been published and endorsed by the Department for Transport. They show that, on

average across the six towns, the level of cycling has increased by 27 per cent in less than three years. The level of cycling to school, measured by the most severe measure of very regular cycling, has increased by 17 per cent overall and in some schools exceptionally by as much as 107 per cent. The levels of physical activity—or at least declines in inactivity—have been measured by health assessment and show a significant increase in physical activity in all the towns. In addition, the number of cyclists, not just the number of trips, has increased. None of those figures is replicated in any other city or town in the United Kingdom, with the exception of London. We can confidently say, therefore, that the approach is paying off. It works and has already reversed a 30-year downward trend.

Of course, five years' funding will not create a true cycling town. We therefore urge people to think about consistency and the length of time for which investment is provided in continental Europe if they want to see sustained and enduring behavioural change.

The Convener: Thank you very much. I hand over to Cathy Peattie.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): Good afternoon. I will continue questions about the cycling city, cycling towns programme. I am interested in any lessons that you might have learned from the programme to date. In particular, I would like to know about any barriers that you have had to overcome.

Phillip Darnton: With the benefit of hindsight, the lessons have been largely commonsensical. The first lesson has been the need for absolutely determined leadership. Finding the champion and the leader comes top of our list.

After that, it is about coherence and joining things up. In every town, we have been clear that it is not just a question of saying, "Oh, we could build a section of cycleway here because there's space." It is not a question of saying that we will build it for as long as it is not difficult and then put a sign up that says, "Cyclists Dismount". The routes must be there for a purpose, and the purpose is to persuade people who currently do not cycle to start. That means that the routes need to be continuous from end to end. A 98 per cent excellent route with 2 per cent of horrors in the middle of it will not persuade anybody to cycle it twice. A route must be joined up and go where people want it to go.

14:15

We have often found that towns have built bits of cycling infrastructure without starting by considering who might use it and who they are trying to attract. We always start by saying that it is

about people, then it is about the place and then it is about the purpose. It is not about building stuff first and hoping that people will turn up and find it convenient. It is necessary to start with your target audience: who do you want to get to cycle? In most cases, it is often children. Looking through the committee's call for evidence, it struck me that I would want to stress the opportunity that there is to get children to learn to cycle, and the huge risk of a lost generation if children do not learn, when they are nine, 10, 11 and 12, to ride their bike safely and well.

It is vital to join things up and ensure that, for example, if there is a route, there is parking; if there is parking, there are good signs to tell people how to get there; and if there are good signs, they sign a convenient route. If the route is not, ideally, quicker than by car for a couple of miles or if it takes cyclists in a circuitous way or perhaps through difficult traffic, it will not be convenient and it will not be used. All those aspects are very important.

Contributory factors are mentioned in the committee's papers. Unquestionably, reduction of speed is probably the single biggest factor that encourages more people, particularly women, to cycle. A 20mph speed limit unquestionably creates more cycling. The speed, volume and proximity of cars to cyclists are the factors that deter people from cycling and are definitely the biggest barriers.

People who do not cycle will tell you that they would cycle if there was a secure or, better still, segregated cycle lane. Once people start to cycle, they realise that cycle lanes have a host of problems attached to them and are not, in many cities, the ideal solution. I think that that is why the Department for Transport's hierarchy puts cycle lanes at the bottom of the list of potential interventions, which is probably right.

Cathy Peattie: Thank you for a comprehensive answer. You clearly have lots of ambition and an exciting programme. I am interested in any evaluation process that you set out at the start and what indicators you are looking at in respect of all measures and, in particular, the soft measures. If you have established such indicators, have any factors created problems and poor outcomes?

Phillip Darnton: I will deal first with poor outcomes.

We were intrigued by one town, which said that it thought that it could market its existing cycle routes. It had the very attractive idea, which caught our attention, that it could market cycling in the same way as bus routes had been marketed. It could colour the routes with different colours, produce maps that made it clear that all the routes led into the centre of town and issue something like the London underground map that showed

people where all the routes went. The town had some very imaginative ideas about producing individual maps of one route and getting every estate agent, whenever he let or sold a property, to ensure that the welcome pack let people know that they lived very close to a cycle route to the centre of town.

Signs were put up, which gave times rather than distances. That had three beneficial effects. First, it made people think that they could probably cycle for 20 minutes, whereas they might think that five miles would be a bit much. Secondly, it acted as an advertisement. When there are lots of signs, people start to say, "This is a cycling town—I really notice that." Thirdly, it is an encouraging provocation to motorists, who are stuck in a traffic jam and know full well that their journey will take 20 minutes, to see a sign that it takes 10 minutes on a bike to the town centre.

However—and this is a big however—the routes simply were not good and convenient enough. There is a classic marketing lesson in that regard. Something can be dressed up as much as possible and can be offered to the public in an attractive box, but if the box's contents do not work the approach will not work well. We have had to work hard to sort out some of the shortcomings of the routes, such as difficult crossings of a dual carriageway and a series of mini-roundabouts that had to be negotiated. People who might want to be cyclists are simply put off by such things.

On our achievements, we have a long series of monitoring measures. In our second round, now that we have more funding, we will engage in a substantial evaluation programme. I do not think that I can go into that, but it will be undertaken by the Department for Transport and will involve investment of the order of £3 million in evaluation.

More influential than anything else has been the case that we have made for the benefit of cycling in the context of the benefit to cost ratio. We did work in 2007 with past data, which we have been able to repeat with data from the six cycling towns. The work shows incontrovertibly that investment in cycling, in the way in which Cycling England is investing, pays back at a rate that is not less than 3:1 and might be as much as 4:1, depending on what we agree about one or two of the assumptions. That puts the scheme in the "high" or "very high" category in the DFT's ranking of schemes on the benefit to cost ratio.

Cathy Peattie: Forgive me if you have already talked about this, but I am interested in how you gathered information from cyclists and communities on which parts of the system they thought were working and which parts needed improvement.

Phillip Darnton: If I may, I ask the committee to be careful when it comes to cyclists—I speak as someone who has three managing directors of campaigning organisations on the board of Cycling England. Cyclists are people who put up with the shortcomings of the existing system, and they will often, with the best intentions, tell us what they want to be put right, which is not necessarily what would make non-cyclists start cycling. That is important. We could spend a great deal of money putting things right for cyclists, only to find that we had simply made more attractive to people who already cycle a road that remains terribly unattractive to everybody else.

It is important that we carry cyclists along with us, and we have worked hard to do that in all six towns, most of which have cycling groups. We have cycling forums, which meet the cycling towns organisers regularly, and we encourage that interchange. However, the committee should not lose sight of the objective, which is to get people who do not cycle to take up cycling for short urban trips; it is not to make cyclists feel warm and cosy about investment in improving substandard routes.

Cathy Peattie: I like the idea of warm and cosy cyclists.

Your target is to do with encouraging more people to cycle, which is why I asked about indicators. Did you speak to people? If so, what was the response? Did more people start to cycle? Did more women and children start to cycle? Other committee members will ask about that, but it seems to me that if you are establishing indicators you need to talk to people and find out what they want. You have probably done that, but perhaps you will share with the committee what you have done.

Phillip Darnton: We absolutely have done that. When the towns put together their three-year work programmes, they go through a period of intensive discussion with communities, including cyclists and non-cyclists. I stress that the plans are not somehow invented by Cycling England; local people really do know best. What Cycling England can do is bring challenges and, sometimes, specific help. For example, if a town wants to encourage people in its university to start cycling, we might well be able to say, "Another town has just implemented a programme; why don't you take it lock, stock and barrel, rather than start all over again?"

We can show from the experience of the first six cycling towns that there has been an increase, not just in the number of cycling trips but in the number of cyclists, which is what we are looking for. That has been quantified in those cycling towns.

There is no doubt that the most successful part of the programme has been with schools. In some schools, we have been able to invest Department for Transport funding in bike officer schemes that are managed by Sustrans. We have people in schools as champions who manage the creation of cycling expectation culture and behaviour in the school. We have seen the regular cycling level, which means twice a week, go up by as many as four times. Whenever we survey children aged nine, 10 and 11 in England, more than 45 per cent of them say that they would like to cycle to school. More than 95 per cent of children live within two miles of their school, and most primary schools are in suburban areas and not on big main roads.

Cathy Peattie: You spoke earlier about funding and how successful it has been despite a reduction in the level. I am interested in the pilots that have been done. Are cycling towns and cities asking for more money? How sustainable is the project? Do you see it continuing in the future?

Phillip Darnton: I am glad that you asked that question because we believe that the approach is sustainable. In fact, having run pilots in six cycling towns from 2005 to 2008, we were able to persuade the Department for Transport to increase our funding substantially. Our funding level is now £60 million a year, which has allowed us to launch 11 new cycling towns as well as maintain the first six, and tackle our first really big challenge, a city of almost 600,000 people, which is Bristol together with South Gloucestershire.

I am certain that a three-year programme is not enough to change significantly people's behaviour in the long term. Consistent investment into the future will be necessary. Local authorities have had to match fund all the way through and, as they appreciate what the investment is achieving and that their belief is being proved to them, they will want to continue that funding as best they can. Cycling England will argue that some funding should continue for all those towns into the future as well as opening up the scheme to some new towns. However, Cycling England is appointed on a three-year remit: it was renewed in 2008 and will run out in the spring of 2011. We have not the faintest idea what will happen next.

The Convener: I remind everyone that our time is limited and we are running just a tad behind schedule. If people can bear that in mind, it would be helpful.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I had better speak to you about the bikeability training scheme, which I believe has been a success. Will you please give us a little background to it?

Phillip Darnton: When we launched in 2005, we quickly identified that as well as having cycling

towns, it was important that children should learn to ride their bicycles on the road. For many years, during the late 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and into the early 1980s, we had the cycling proficiency scheme. Like me, many older people still have their cycling proficiency training badges. Cycling training was devolved to local authorities, but gradually it simply dissipated, with only a few local authorities continuing, but with nobody managing it properly to ensure that children had the opportunity to learn to ride their bikes. When the Secretary of State for Transport increased our funding, we were able to start a programme that has ended up being called bikeability. It started with an agreement among 23 organisations about what children need to be able to do on a bicycle, which was codified as the national cycle training standards, which are published and are well known and well understood.

The national cycle training standards set out three levels of competence. Level 1 is about managing your bicycle in a playground and being able to do all the things that you need to do before you go anywhere—keeping your balance, looking over your shoulder and knowing how to apply the brakes and adjust your handlebars and so on. Level 2 is about beginning to get experience on the smallest roads in groups of six, with two instructors. Level 3 is about giving you real experience on what I would call acceptable minor suburban roads—children will obviously not be cycling on dual carriageways.

14:30

Having got that agreement and that body of learning together, we were able, with funding from the DFT, to offer local authorities bursaries. That meant that people who were already doing cycle training—independent commercial providers of cycle training—could apply for a bursary for up-to-date, top-up training in the national standards. Each year, we have been able to offer local authorities and commercial providers such bursaries in order to ensure that instructors, from wherever they come, are competent in the national standards, and that they are registered, accredited, Criminal Records Bureau screened and on a list of accredited and approved instructors.

Secondly, we have a grant scheme of £40 per child, which we do not claim covers the whole cost of a child's training, which would probably be about eight or nine lessons of about three quarters of an hour each, but which makes a substantial contribution to it. Local authorities may apply simply by saying which schools and how many pupils are involved. They can then indent, as it were, for £40 per pupil for training to supplement the cycle training that they are already doing. It is

to supplement, not to supplant their provision. Through that, by the middle of this year an additional 500,000 children will be competent to cycle on small roads. Given the continuation of funding, our aim is that by 2012 every child in year 6 in primary school in England—every child aged 10 to 11—will have the opportunity to get their bikeability training.

All the technical stuff was turned into a consumer-facing product or brand, if you will, called bikeability, with three badges—red, yellow and green—and a system of training and instruction that allows instructors to award the badges and certificates and call them up from a central source. It is done on a national basis, which we feel gives parents and schools reassurance that what the children are learning in their cycle training is proper, approved, accredited and safe. The national coherence that has come from bikeability is probably the biggest single thing that Cycling England has achieved with its partners.

Rob Gibson: Thank you. I am interested to know a bit about the funding of bikeability. You said that it is probably coming from bursaries and/or other supplements. Is that from the £60 million that Cycling England gets at the moment?

Phillip Darnton: Yes.

Rob Gibson: Are cycle training schemes other than bikeability available in England?

Phillip Darnton: Any one could turn up and knock on someone's door and say, "Can I train you or your family?" There is no regulation in that sense. What we have established through the DFT is that bikeability is the Government-endorsed and approved scheme and it is the only scheme that runs nationwide. Once we had convinced a number of local authorities that had their own schemes that bikeability is the best available scheme, that it is here to stay and that it is well managed and administered and has the oversight of the DFT, they were generous and gracious enough to say that there being one national scheme, with one national website with separate sections for parents, teachers and children, which enables us to do quite specific things in schools anywhere in the country and to print material that refers consistently and uniformly to bikeability training, has huge advantages of scope and scale that no individual local authority can provide.

Rob Gibson: Thank you very much.

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): We have already heard a great deal about what you have done to increase the number of children who cycle. What work have you undertaken to increase the number of women cyclists?

Phillip Darnton: That is probably the most difficult question. The answer is in two parts. First, we have concentrated on working with people in every walk of life who want that to happen: we have worked with the local authorities that have said that they are keen to turn their authority into a cycling authority and we have worked with schools that have been keen to encourage children to cycle to school. We have not yet tackled some of the more difficult issues. We have been at pains to prove that well-focused investment pays back and I think that we have done that. The issue of women and cycling is extremely important, and rather difficult. It is clear that cycling in England is quite different from continental Europe, where the proportion of men and women who cycle is more or less 50:50. Throughout England, it is 3:1 in favour of men. Those men tend to be under 35, white, middle class and, often, extremely aggressive commuting cyclists.

Getting women to cycle is difficult, so we have started a series of programmes aimed at women because they are probably the most important group to get cycling. If a woman becomes a mother and that mother does not cycle, it is unlikely that she will easily agree to her child learning to cycle or that her child can, having had lessons, cycle unsupervised. It is important that we encourage young women to cycle and we are tackling that in some of our cycling towns, with programmes called beauty and the bike, which are based loosely around the idea that young women want to feel beautiful and elegant as they become teenagers. There are sessions about make-up and hair and so on, leading on to health and healthy activity, which lead in turn to cycling and, we hope, to cycle lessons and to breaking down the barriers to cycling that young women talk about.

We have another scheme running in Darlington called DarLOVElo, in which we are providing cheap and extended hire of extremely pretty, low, step-through bicycles. The scheme is focused especially at young women from 16 upwards who are perhaps taking their first job in the city and so are being encouraged to learn to cycle and to try out a bike before they decide whether to buy one. At the end of the day, all of the work on the bike it scheme that we do in schools is an endeavour to engage with mothers. We have done a lot of work with the Netmums website. We are trying all kinds of approaches to women—mothers in particular—but it is a big challenge.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: At the risk of being slightly antagonistic, some of the schemes sound a tad patronising to women—certainly to this young woman, who may have different reasons for not cycling than not having a pretty pink bike. Has that approach been successful anywhere else?

Phillip Darnton: I am sorry, but I do not understand the question. Do you mean any other country in the world?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Has the pretty pink bike theory been proven to work?

Phillip Darnton: I am sorry if you think that that is patronising. It is certainly not meant to be. To refer to a previous question, a large group of young women selected the bikes themselves. My description of them may fall short—if you prefer them to be described as low step-through urban Dutch bicycles, so be it. The colour is, perhaps, immaterial but it was quite important to the group. I have every confidence that schemes of that kind will work. My core point—on which I think you and I will not in any way disagree—is that women are absolutely critical to future generations learning to ride their bikes and adopting cycling as an everyday activity for short trips. A host of measures are being tried to achieve that.

The fact that most women find the speed, volume and proximity of traffic extremely intimidating is one reason why I think that cycle lanes often do not help. Cycle lanes trap the cyclist in that lane—even though the cyclist needs to leave the lane to turn right—so motorists begin to believe that the cyclist belongs only in the cycle lane. Motorists then drive extremely close to the dividing white line and they drive very fast. All those things, which almost make certain that women in particular do not cycle, need to be addressed.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I also want to ask about the online cycle journey planner, which is currently under development. How is it envisaged that it will work? What successes is it hoped that such a planner will produce?

Phillip Darnton: I am not a high technician, but I think that the online cycle journey planner could be one of the most significant innovations that we are currently working on. By 2012, the online planner will allow people in every town in England to enter the postcodes of where they are and where they want to be and to see immediately three choices of route that, for our purposes at the moment, we might nickname “Quickest”, “Quietest” and “Greenest”. The planner will also let people see the topography of their route—how many hills it has, how steep those hills are and what alternatives are available to cycling up or down those hills in getting from the starting location to the destination. The online planner will be integrated into car and bus journey planners such that if, for example, someone wants to get from one side of town to another, its default mode will be to tell the user—whether or not the user has asked for bicycle information—what the quickest way is for getting to that destination. If the quickest mode is by bicycle, the user will be told that it is quicker to go by bike than by car or bus.

The online planner will be useful to many public services. For example, when people in a hospital call in a patient for their regular check-up, the fact that they will know both the patient’s postcode and the hospital’s postcode will mean that, along with the appointment reminder, they could print out or e-mail details of exactly how, road by road, people could cycle to the hospital or where to park their bicycles. The planner will also mean that, for every school in the country, people will be able to sit down with a child and plan out the best, safest and quietest route to school for that child.

I suspect that, by 2012, several mobile phone companies will be very interested in having the opportunity to upload the technology to mobile phones, which could then speak to the user, just as a global positioning system does, to describe road by road how to get from the chosen start point to the destination. Such a piece of technology could turn into something that is formidably reassuring to parents. Parents will be able to know that their children are cycling on the quietest roads to and from school, or at least that their children know which are the quietest roads. Of course, what the children actually do remains to be seen.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That all sounds very interesting. How much is that project costing to set up? How long has it taken to get to the 2012 launching point?

14:45

Phillip Darnton: The project has been incredibly painful and has taken a long time to set up, partly because the technology relies on rather a lot of sophisticated partners. We work immediately with the transport direct website—which is part of the Department for Transport—because it runs the journey planners for cars and buses in the United Kingdom. That is why we want the cycle journey planner to be integrated, ultimately. In turn, transport direct works with contractors for lots of the hardware and the engines that drive the data.

It has been difficult to get started, but I am now confident that the planner will happen. The cost will be quite high, although I am not confident that I could give you authoritative figures now. We are using a group to survey every town by bicycle. Such surveys are much more complicated for bicycles than they are for cars, because there are cycle paths, places of shared use and bridleways, for instance, that may allow for cycling, all of which must be accounted for. On a national scale, I think that the cost will run over £1.5 million before we are through. I am not quite sure, but it will certainly be of that order.

Cycling England would be delighted to share as much of that work with other Governments as it can. As I understand it, most of the very expensive stuff has been done and the costs now are quite modest because they are the survey costs of the town in question.

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): Cycling England has undertaken some work on integration of cycling and public transport. Will you outline any areas of best practice that you have identified?

Phillip Darnton: I am not sure that I quite understand the question. Cycling England is focused entirely on cycling schemes. Cycling for short urban trips works best where there is good public transport because it is possible to promote schemes—as we are doing with a number of train operating companies—that encourage people to cycle to their station in the morning or, possibly, from their station of egress to their place of work.

An end-to-end journey—it might be by bicycle, by train and bicycle or by bicycle, train and walking—is extremely attractive to plan because it offers people the opportunity to use a bicycle for a relatively short and easy period. Wherever possible, we should encourage cycling to a tram point or a bus station and ensure that the bus station has convenient high-quality cycle parking. Often, cycle parking is put where nobody can see it a long way away, so people end up not using it at all and putting their bikes on the railings or not cycling.

There is a real integration of opportunity. Cycling England's focus has been on train operating companies and railway stations.

Marlyn Glen: That is an important piece of work that, I hope, will be pushed forward in Scotland too.

Phillip Darnton: I add that we have adopted the approach that we took with our cycling towns, which was to focus. We asked the train operating companies which of them were interested and to send us proposals and ideas. Four of them came up with some really interesting ideas that were more than just parking at the station.

I come back to the principle of making the money work hard, focusing and working with people who want to do it and who have some really bright ideas. By the end of 2010, we should have some projects that we can share—qualitatively if not quantitatively—and say, “These look like schemes that work.”

Marlyn Glen: You support councillors and other elected members who are interested in becoming cycling champions. Will you provide some information on that activity and highlight any successes that are attributable to such cycling champions?

Phillip Darnton: Yes. Clearly, in all our 18 cycling towns, we are absolutely reliant on that sense of cross-party political support from councillors. It is not naive to say that this is a supra-political issue—I honestly believe that. Cycling England is absolutely not a policy-making or lobbying group of any kind; it is a delivery group. The opportunities that cycling presents are there for everyone.

We are keen to encourage local authorities to find champions within their authority area. We have started a regular e-mail system for champions, which they can use to communicate with one another on topics of interest. We have not had as much resource as we would have liked to put into that, but we feel that we are now at the stage where we can start to learn from the first 18 towns, share that learning better and create a wider network than we have been able to create thus far.

The Convener: The clock is showing that there are only one or two minutes for the final wrap-up in this session.

Marlyn Glen: Has Cycling England had any input into how cycling policy in England will be influenced by the cycling city, cycling towns programme?

Phillip Darnton: I think that I referred to that in my previous answer. As I said, Cycling England is absolutely a delivery body. It is not our place to make policy. That said, a number of things that we have demonstrated must surely have come to the attention of the DFT—a process that I call parallel conversations. In the middle of this year, we will put forward a proposal in which we will say what we would like the Department for Transport to invest in over the next three years. In the end, the matter is for the DFT to decide.

The committee papers make many references to bike hire schemes. We have seen the launch of a mighty bike hire scheme in London this year. Cycling England is very conscious that bike hire may become fashionable, but it is extremely expensive to undertake. Before any council embarks on a bike hire scheme, it is very important that they establish who on earth the scheme is for and what it is for. We know of one or two schemes that are extremely inexpensive and well thought out in terms of target groups and hardware. Those schemes are nothing like the London scheme, which will cost £115 million. Cycling England urges our towns to be exceedingly clear and careful before they embark on a substantial bike hire scheme.

The Convener: Thank you for that last observation. I am glad that the camera was pointing in this direction when you made it; you would otherwise have seen the expression on the

minister's face when he heard the figure that you have just mentioned.

I apologise that we have been tight for time. Thank you for answering our questions.

Phillip Darnton: Thank you.

14:53

Meeting suspended.

14:57

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome the last panel: Stewart Stevenson, the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, and Scottish Government officials Kirsty Lewin, team leader of the sustainable transport team, and Karen Furey, the transport directorate's cycling policy manager.

I gather that you have some opening remarks to make, minister. We are fairly tight for time and have a substantial number of questions, but you are more than welcome to make us aware of anything new.

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I am more than happy to go straight to questions, if that is your preference.

The Convener: Thank you. That is appreciated. The committee has heard repeated calls for greater funding, in particular for the idea that 10 per cent of all transport budgets should be spent on walking and cycling. The figure is around 1 per cent at the moment. What is your reaction to calls for a sustained and substantial increase in the active travel budget?

Stewart Stevenson: I welcome the committee's interest in the subject. I hope that the output of your deliberations will inform Government policy making. I am sure that it will be helpful.

Councils, of course, take the lead on this. If we look at what is going on around Scotland, there seems to be no identifiable relationship between outcomes and expenditure. In other words, there is a huge degree of variability in the bang for buck, so to speak. The spending per capita is hugely variable—I think that it goes down to 8p in one council, but I will not name names unless you press me.

The Convener: Feel free to do so.

15:00

Stewart Stevenson: It happens to be Midlothian Council. However, to put that in context, the figures that we have are the ones of which we are aware; there may be funding that individual

councils are drawing in from other sources of which we are not aware. That is one of the reasons why I would not particularly draw your attention to those figures. The lowest level of spending on cycling per capita is 8p and the highest is £1.35—there is a huge range. Nevertheless, we do not see a relationship between that expenditure and the outcomes.

There are some areas of good practice and some areas where there is a bit of catching up to be done. In earlier evidence, you were quoted the sum of £200 million. However, there would not be the capability to spend that money. I am more interested in ensuring that everyone learns lessons from and shares the experiences of those who are doing particularly well so that their performance can be repeated throughout Scotland. To focus solely on money in the first instance would be to miss the opportunity to use the money that is already available—which has been increasing—to deliver significant value.

There is huge variation in the numbers of people who cycle. However, although 8.3 per cent of children in Highland, 6.1 per cent of children in Moray and 5.4 per cent of children in East Lothian cycle to school, those authorities are not the top spenders by any manner of means.

The Convener: You highlight the difference between local authorities that spend pennies and those that spend £1 or so per head, but is it not possible that little can be achieved in either case, as we are comparing areas in which we are doing very little with areas in which we are doing not very much? In the previous evidence session, we heard about the experience in some parts of England, where spending has risen to £10 or £15 per head rather than pennies or £1. Countries that are making that level of investment have achieved substantial changes. The Scottish Government wants a 10 per cent modal share for cycling by 2020, but we must bring the funding with that at an ambitious level. Is it credible to think that we can achieve that 10 per cent modal share without making an investment?

Stewart Stevenson: I am making a different point. We must satisfy ourselves that we have the capability to improve the rate of cycling throughout Scotland. The evidence at the moment is that it is pretty patchy and that the amount of cycling that we are getting as a result of the investments that are being made is highly variable.

Through smarter choices, smarter places we will invest £76 per person over a three-year period in a range of interventions including cycling. I am advised that we expect to spend some £22 per head on cycling. The numbers that I have talked about in relation to councils are historical numbers relating to 2008, but quite a lot of money is now going into cycling. My immediate focus—it should

be everyone's focus—is to ensure that we get a consistent return on the investment that we make instead of simply pouring more money in, which might deliver relatively little of value in certain areas, although it would return more in areas that are doing very well.

The Convener: You described the results that have been achieved across Scotland as patchy. Is it not the case that, if Scotland is to achieve substantial, long-term improvements in the level of active travel—walking and cycling—as a modal share as well as in absolute terms, we need ambitious spending throughout Scotland? I will quote some of the written evidence that the committee has received on the issue. One witness wrote:

“The level of investment in cycling in many European countries has been at the level of around £15 per head ... for many decades. Only this level of sustained expenditure is likely to create the conditions within the urban fabric necessary ... for the promotion of cycling.”

Another witness wrote that the level of investment in cycling

“is far below those countries which have ... achieved and surpassed the cycling target of 10% ... which the ... government has set”.

Another witness wrote that the transfer of funding to local authorities,

“combined with the removal of ring fencing, has seen a dramatic reduction in capital spending on walking and cycling. Unless there is a change ... the significant progress made in recent years ... will not be sustained and the Governments objectives for mode shift and CO2 reduction will be in severe danger of not being achieved.”

Should the committee not be very worried by such comments and be looking for a much more national approach to investing a substantial share of the transport budget in this area?

Stewart Stevenson: Any committee has to be very concerned to ensure that the money that is invested in a policy area delivers value. You talk of ambitious spending, but the high variability of outcomes per pound suggests that we have not necessarily got the focus and delivery on the ground that would guarantee that additional money would deliver the outcomes that we seek.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I seek clarification of the figure of £22 per head to which you referred. Can you explain what that figure is for?

Stewart Stevenson: Let me ask my official to do so, because I am not sure that I can.

Kirsty Lewin (Scottish Government Transport Directorate): That figure is from the smarter choices, smarter places programme, which is a partnership programme of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Government. Seven communities across the

country are involved in it. There is £15 million in the programme, including match funding from local authorities. The £22 per head is the amount being spent in the programme directly on cycling. However, there are obviously other interventions in the programme as well.

Stewart Stevenson: I apologise, because it is clear that I misled you in the way that I expressed that earlier. I make it clear that the £22 per head is within the scope of that project rather than being the per capita figure for every person in Scotland.

Alison McInnes: That is helpful.

The Convener: Just for clarity, the evidence that we have had is that current spending on walking and cycling equates roughly to 1 per cent of the transport budget, although some suggest that it is slightly less than that. Does that figure include the spending in the project that you have just described?

Stewart Stevenson: Do bear in mind that the smarter choices, smarter places programme is not only within transport. Essentially, though, the figure to which you referred would be a good approximation.

The Convener: Again, the comparison is with countries that have achieved substantial modal shift over years or even decades through contributing a substantial share of their transport budgets to achieve that outcome.

Stewart Stevenson: I would prefer it if we focused on the processes that have been undertaken. In other words, funding following success is perfectly reasonable but, at the moment, with a highly variable set of outcomes for similar financial inputs, it is clear that we have process issues with which we must deal. We have seen very successful long-term processes in other countries that have led to large amounts of cycling. Of course, in some cases, that is because they avoided the reduction in cycling that we have seen in the UK, particularly in Scotland, over recent years by undertaking a range of interventions over a long time.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I have a question about the 1 per cent of the transport budget that is spent on walking and cycling. Does that take into account money from other budget pots, such as the climate challenge fund, which might also finance projects that assist with cycling? Such funding might not be included in the 1 per cent.

Stewart Stevenson: The climate challenge fund is over and above that 1 per cent. When we consider what is over and above the 1 per cent, it is worth making the point that walking measures are part-financed by the health budget.

Alison McInnes: You have identified significant concerns about the variable outcomes. I am

interested to know what you are actively doing to address the processes that are failing. What discussions are you having with local authorities about that?

Stewart Stevenson: You are correct to point to local authorities, which have the primary responsibility. We have regular discussions with them. I have highlighted several successes by various local authorities to COSLA, so that it can take action to share success around.

In Aberdeenshire, in which you and I have an interest, the figure is slightly above average, which is good news. However, in some cities and other urban areas, the figures are significantly below the average. Only 0.6 per cent of journeys to school in Inverclyde are by bicycle, whereas the Scottish figure is 2.8 per cent. I think that Inverclyde is the lowest performer, whereas in Highland—where we might think that reaching the target might present a challenge—the figure is 8.3 per cent, and in Moray, the figure is 6.1 per cent.

In many cases, particular people—often small numbers, or even an individual—are very committed to the agenda and make good use of the resources. Over a sustained time, they manage to make cycling important to the community and to the council's decision makers and administrators. We encourage COSLA to consider how to exchange good experiences, but ministers do not dictate to COSLA or local authorities.

Alison McInnes: Indeed not. However, the implication of your earlier answers was that you could not countenance a bigger investment in cycling until the situation was sorted out, so the matter is clearly for the Government. In his evidence, the witness from Cycling England urged you to work with people who are interested in increasing cycling. Investment could flow forward when people had successful outcomes, which might snowball into other authorities saying, "Perhaps we can do that." At what point would you countenance significantly more investment in cycling?

Stewart Stevenson: The cycling action plan deals with how best to implement, through guidance, provision for training planners and engineers, to create an environment in which more people feel that cycling is safe. It is clear that the perception is widespread in cities in particular that cycling is not safe enough for people to convert their travel to it. We plan to take several actions on that. We will publish "Cycling by Design" in April, to supplement the cycling action plan, and we will consider planning on designing streets.

We are taking several actions that will start to deconstruct the actual and perceived barriers. I make that distinction because, although it is

accepted that real barriers exist, the other issue is the psychology of people's approach to cycling. Some of that is soundly based, but we need to work to explain other matters to people.

The Convener: You mentioned processes. I was going to ask about the cycling action plan and where walking is covered. We have heard calls for a national strategic approach that covers walking and cycling. Is the Government looking at that? Does it have potential?

15:15

Stewart Stevenson: We are promoting walking, primarily from a health point of view. Just before coming to the committee, I looked at my ministerial travel diary and found that, as a minister, I have made 524 walking journeys of 10 minutes or more so far—I do not bother to record the journeys of less than 10 minutes. What the committee is doing is important. You have taken evidence on the benefits of joining walking and cycling together. Walking is essentially health led and cycling is transport led. They have a clear relationship to each other but, at the moment, people tend to make one choice or the other. I do a lot of walking but almost no cycling, because of the circumstances in which I find myself, and I think that others make similar choices. However, if we can get significant proportions of people to convert their short journeys to either walking or cycling, that will have a huge benefit in relation to climate change and the health of the nation, which has wider benefits, too.

The Convener: You acknowledged in an earlier answer that a degree of political leadership is important, as is funding. What level of government in Scotland do you see as most relevant? Does there have to be local or regional leadership? What is the Scottish Government's role in creating a national culture that supports walking and cycling?

Stewart Stevenson: It is clear that success has come through local initiatives. This is precisely the sort of thing that I think is best delivered in the first instance by local authorities. We will achieve change by getting the next generation to change the way in which they travel. It is clear that sometimes people do not even know how successful they have been. For example, 18 months ago, I visited Dunbar on another matter altogether and discovered that 300 of the children at the local primary school cycled to school—they did not even know how exceptional their performance was. That had been led by grass-roots action by the school council and the pupils themselves, who insisted on having the facilities, which they were able to get provided, for parking and tying up their bicycles in shelters and so forth, and persuaded their peers to cycle. Successes

have almost invariably been derived from a level that is close to people, such as through a serious and committed person in local government or, as was the case in Dunbar, through the actions of the schoolchildren themselves, whose enthusiasm had been motivated in the first instance by having access to cycle training, which led them back to cycling. A diktat from Edinburgh is much less likely to achieve real change than real, on-the-ground action.

The Convener: That relates to individual decision making about how I, my family or my class would travel. What about changing policy and the culture of how Scotland deals with this issue? Does the Scottish Government have a role in driving that forward and showing political leadership on it?

Stewart Stevenson: Of course, but, at the end of the day, if we have all that but we do not have delivery, we have nothing. In other words, having a policy that sits on the shelf is only one thing. We need to ensure that we have policies and actions in government that deconstruct barriers to change, which we are doing through the cycling action plan, "Cycling by Design" and the designing streets planning work, all of which is geared to ensuring that we deconstruct barriers. The smarter choices, smarter places part of our action is about sharing good practice, but we clearly have a lot more to do.

The Convener: You say that the Government's role is to deconstruct barriers and that, after that, it is local activism that will bring about change, but is there not a problem with that, which is related to the fact—I do not know whether it is a cause or an effect—that, when it comes to transport, we still make decisions on major capital infrastructure projects without counting the carbon cost, for example? We are still in a position in which, from the point of view of political momentum, a great deal of the emphasis is on spending much larger sums of money on projects that support conventional modes of travel when much smaller and cheaper interventions on active travel could be successful. The result is that active travel loses out. I am not seeking to have a dialogue about whether some of the projects on which you and I might disagree are good or bad ideas, but they squeeze out much cheaper projects on active travel, progress on which everyone seems to agree would be welcome.

Stewart Stevenson: I think that you said that we do not count the carbon cost of major projects. I am not sure which projects—

The Convener: As I understand it, the Scottish transport appraisal guidance still does not count the cost of carbon.

Stewart Stevenson: The STAG process is not the decision-making process. We have published the carbon costs of our major projects.

The Convener: I am talking about the analysis of cost benefit ratios and so on on much larger projects. My point is that, fundamentally, we have not changed the way in which we make transport policies and priorities to reflect the carbon targets.

Stewart Stevenson: I beg to differ.

The Convener: Okay—we will move on.

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): Cycling provision by local authorities is patchy across Scotland. What can the Scottish Government do to ensure a minimum level of cycling provision?

Stewart Stevenson: Remember that the single outcome agreements process is one whereby central and local government jointly agree what is to be delivered to the people whom we jointly represent. That is the mechanism through which local authorities are challenged by central Government but, increasingly, local communities are involved in deciding what councils should do through community planning partnerships, which draw in more people from communities to help to identify the sort of decisions that we should make. Such change will lead us in the right direction.

What one can achieve in a densely populated urban setting may be entirely different from what one can achieve in Aberdeenshire, where 57 per cent of people live in a rural setting, or in the Highlands, where remoteness is a huge issue. Applying a single, centrally directed target to all 32 councils is unlikely to be particularly helpful to councils or to the cause of cycling.

Charlie Gordon: I presume that you would like to see those processes contributing to the achievement of the national target on modal share for cycling and active travel in general.

Stewart Stevenson: Yes, that is very much the case. If we do not get change at grass-roots level, we will not get the changes that we have set ourselves as a challenge for Scotland as a whole. That is precisely why we need to have a relationship that involves the different levels of government as equal partners. The fact that COSLA is on the cycling action plan for Scotland board shows that we have the kind of joined-up government that should help us to address that issue on cycling specifically.

Charlie Gordon: The committee has heard calls for ring-fenced funding to be made available to local authorities so that they can deliver cycling improvements. What is your response to those calls?

Stewart Stevenson: Ring fencing is simply a way of disempowering local authorities and transferring power back to central Government. As you will know, when we came into office we found that some 25 per cent of the funding that went to local government from central Government was ring fenced for in the order of 200 separate work streams. That clearly reduced the scope for local decision making and placed a huge administrative burden on local authorities to report what they were doing with their wee pots of money for each of those 200 streams. I am very pleased that one of the first things that we did was to cut the proportion of ring-fenced funding back down to 4 per cent or thereabouts.

It is unlikely it would be helpful to move in the opposite direction. In 2009-10, we are giving £11.83 billion, which is up from £11.07 billion in the previous year; it is also an increase on the year before that. Trusting local authorities is most likely to lead to good outcomes. I am not suggesting that funds were ring fenced out of perversity, as I can understand why some ring fencing happened, but it started to control the whole process. It is probably generally recognised that sometimes when money came ring fenced from central Government, local government decided, "That is the money for that," and did not themselves put money in, so the financial effects were not always as beneficial as might have been hoped for. If we cannot persuade and trust local government, we have a fundamental problem across a range of policy areas.

Charlie Gordon: The committee has heard evidence in the inquiry from regional transport partnerships, which carry out some of this work on behalf of local authorities, as their agents—we heard similar evidence in our previous inquiry into the draft Scottish budget for next year—that there was perhaps a reduction in resources being transferred from councils to regional transport partnerships for transport in general and for active travel, principally cycling. Leaving aside the debate about ring fencing, is there a danger that the active travel agenda, with other transport agendas, is suffering because councillors in unitary authorities take the view that, as public finances are squeezed, they must give priority to other services and perhaps less priority to agendas such as the active travel agenda?

Stewart Stevenson: Councillors are masters and mistresses of their own destiny and are accountable to their electorate for what they do. It is clear from the postbags of councillors with whom I am in contact and from my constituency and ministerial postbags that local transport facilities in general are quite high up people's list of priorities. Therefore, I would be surprised if a council's politicians and officials, who are engaged with local communities, did not seek to ensure that

they demonstrate their support for what local communities want them to do.

However, politics is about making choices. None of us ever has the luxury of doing everything that we might wish to do at the one time, and it is for local authorities to make the appropriate decisions. For example, the transport issues that have been identified through the contributions of community planning partnerships to single outcome agreements are clear: to reduce the proportion of driver journeys; to reduce delay due to traffic congestion; to increase the proportion of journeys to work made by public and active transport; to improve the quality of road transport infrastructure; to improve safety; and to increase cycling and walking to school. It is clear that there is grass-roots engagement with councils to ensure that cycling and walking are given appropriate priority. It is now up to councillors and council officials to respond to that and to ensure that they plan accordingly.

Charlie Gordon: What role do you see Cycling Scotland playing in the future development of cycling in Scotland? Can any lessons be learned from the experiences—not necessarily all of them, of course—of Cycling England? Is there a need for a single body to take responsibility for driving forward the agenda? If so, which body would be the most appropriate?

15:30

Stewart Stevenson: Cycling Scotland has core funding from the Scottish Government to promote cycling. It undertakes a number of work streams: the cycle-friendly employer award; the cycle-friendly school award; the promotion of bike week; the provision of design guidance for cycling and training for local authorities; the training of about 140 school cycling trainers a year; and disbursing a series of small grants to community groups. Unfortunately, I did not hear the whole of Cycling England's evidence—I heard the beginning of it in my office and some of the end of it here—but I will, of course, read the *Official Report* carefully.

The final documentation on the cycling action plan for Scotland will set out the way in which we will take the agenda forward. I am absolutely sure that one can learn things from another jurisdiction's experience, and it is useful that the committee has drawn that in. My officials were in the public gallery for Cycling England's evidence precisely to hear about that. I understand that Karen Furey recently met representatives of Cycling England, so we have been in touch to exchange information, because we certainly do not imagine that we have all the answers.

Cathy Peattie: You rightly said that it is important to target the next generation, and I

agree with you in relation to cycling. You will be aware that a number of committee members—Rob Gibson and I, for instance—visited Copenhagen and took the opportunity to examine cycling there. I got quite excited, as did Rob, by the cycling training that was available for children.

I accept that the Danes have started from a different place and that we have a long way to go, so I am not asking you why we are not doing the same things—I appreciate that there are differences. However, we have heard evidence that provision for training in schools is piecemeal throughout Scotland. Does the Scottish Government or Cycling Scotland have any plans to improve cycling training and provide a universal package of training throughout the country?

Stewart Stevenson: It is certainly true that not enough children are being trained at the moment. Some 10 per cent of primary 6 children are being trained, but the proportion varies in different areas. That is one of the reasons why Cycling Scotland is focusing on increasing the number of people who can provide that training.

There is also evidence that the type of training provided is quite important to outcomes. An uncomfortably large proportion of training is done in the playground. That is probably the first step—it is a necessary one—to ensure that the children are able to manage a bike properly, but success comes when the training goes out on to the street and the children are exposed in a controlled way to the real hazards and issues that they have to look out for on the streets. Therefore, we are particularly interested in ensuring that we get more of such training.

Much of the training is done by volunteers and co-ordinated by the road safety officers, the police or the active schools co-ordinators. The picture is quite variable.

Cathy Peattie: Can the situation be improved in order to achieve the targets that you want to achieve in the long term? Can any other measures be taken, perhaps to co-ordinate some of the work that is being done?

Stewart Stevenson: Our objective is to ensure that all children have access to cycle road training in the next few years because it is clear that that will make the real difference. The situation can certainly be improved.

Cathy Peattie: Has the Scottish Government or Cycling Scotland done any work to encourage women or other groups that are less likely to cycle? Please do not tell me that it is about buying pretty pink bikes.

Stewart Stevenson: I am sorry—I did not quite catch what you said.

Cathy Peattie: It was suggested in earlier evidence that women might be encouraged to cycle if they had pretty pink bikes. I know that you will not tell me that.

Stewart Stevenson: No, I certainly will not.

I met women cyclists when I received from them a petition that was presented to the Welsh Assembly Government, the Scottish Government and the Department for Transport at Westminster. The petition focuses on women's perception that cycling is unsafe. It is certainly the case that women are two times less likely than men to take up cycling. We will look at the petition from that women for cycling campaign—I cannot remember its correct name—but we have just received the material so we have yet to look at it. However, it is clear that we have a particular issue with women that reflects the broader safety concerns that exist among people who do not currently cycle.

Cathy Peattie: On people who do not currently cycle, I understand that the Scottish Government and Cycling Scotland undertook an equality impact assessment to look at the barriers that prevent people from cycling and engaging in active travel. How can participation in cycling be increased in terms of gender, race, religion, faith, cultural factors and disability? What were the outcomes of the equality impact assessment? How will those barriers be overcome?

Stewart Stevenson: Karen Furey can comment on that.

Karen Furey (Scottish Government Transport Directorate): During the consultation on CAPS, I carried out an equality impact assessment that involved writing to or visiting all the equality groups. The barriers that those groups mentioned were broadly no different—give or take a couple of specific examples—from those that other people face. The barriers were still mainly safety and volume of traffic, although there were also some cultural barriers that, during our discussions, we were unsure whether we could overcome. I was not surprised that equality groups were also worried about safety as a barrier. More specifically, the disability sector was worried about shared space and about how a cycle path and a pedestrian path would work together. The CAPS document will contain a section on the outcomes of the equality impact assessment.

Cathy Peattie: Convener, I would like to be kept up to date with how that work progresses. I am pleased to hear that an equality impact assessment was carried out, but the benefit of such an exercise really comes from looking at the issues and carrying them forward. I would like to see how that develops.

Stewart Stevenson: If the committee—perhaps through the medium of its report—or individual

members want us to consider specific material, we would be happy to receive it. This is not a closed-door subject by any means.

The Convener: Thank you. That is appreciated.

Alison McInnes: According to “Scottish Government Environmental Performance—Annual Report 2007/08”, Scottish Government staff cycled just 328 miles on business but drove 2.05 million miles during that year. What is the Government doing to encourage cycling by its own staff on business, where appropriate? What does the Scottish Government do to encourage other public and private sector employers to use active travel for business purposes?

Stewart Stevenson: First, I suspect that the 328 miles probably refers only to those that were claimed through expenses, but I do not wish to give false certainty about that. As members will know, it is possible to claim such travel at, I think, 12p per mile—

Kirsty Lewin: At 20p per mile.

Stewart Stevenson: There we are. People can claim 20p per mile if they provide their own bicycle for business purposes. However, I suspect that what I have said is the case.

We did a number of things during 2008. The travel plan co-ordinator ran an awareness campaign across the main Government buildings in Edinburgh and Glasgow. In part, that was done on the back of an understanding that the figures do not suggest that we are doing particularly well. The campaign was launched for bike week in 2008.

Of course, we are also doing other things on Scottish Government travel planning. In particular, we are encouraging car sharing by those who cannot make the modal shift and we are encouraging walking. At Victoria Quay, we now have an enunciator in the main entrance that repeats information from the bus stop about when the next buses will arrive. All that helps people to understand the range of more sustainable travel offerings that are available to them.

Alison McInnes: I have a couple of specific questions. Do you operate bike pools so that staff can hop on a bike to go between offices? Do you offer salary-sacrifice schemes to encourage staff to purchase bikes?

Stewart Stevenson: We offer a salary-sacrifice scheme. *[Interruption.]* I am being told by my official that 156 staff have taken it up so far, but we will continue to promote it. We do not currently have a bike pool.

The Convener: I have a quick supplementary question. Numerous measures could be taken in relation to Scottish Government internal travel that

would show leadership to the rest of the public sector and other large employers. For example, are there targets to reduce the 2.05 million miles of driving or to increase the proportion of cycling and walking? Is there still a gap between the expenses that are payable for driving one’s own car and for cycling? You said that 156 staff members have used the salary-sacrifice scheme to buy a bike. Is there a comparative figure for those who are provided with cars for business use?

Stewart Stevenson: The gap per mile is closing. I think that I am correct in saying that it is 40p a mile for the first 9,000 miles of travel claimed, before it drops to 25p a mile.

You mentioned leadership. I have become slightly boring on the subject to colleagues, civil servants and others. I can report that yesterday I made my 1,000th journey as a minister by train or bus. As it happened, it was a train journey, which was immediately followed by the 1,001st journey, which was by bus. In 2010 we will update our travel plan to ensure that we have a bespoke plan that relates to the Scottish Government’s specific need to reduce the carbon footprint of our activities.

The Convener: I am not clear whether that will include targets of the kind that I suggested to reduce vehicle miles.

Stewart Stevenson: We have not set specific targets at this stage.

The Convener: Would setting targets not help?

Stewart Stevenson: It might help; we can certainly think about it. We are taking actions that will lead to improved outcomes. That is the important thing that we have to do.

Together with approximately 7,500 other public bodies, we have duties as a public body under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. We have an overall objective to increase the proportion of sustainable transport that is used on Government business.

Alison McInnes: The committee has heard concerns about the piecemeal development of cycling infrastructure along those parts of the trunk road network that are accessible to cyclists. Why has that happened, and what is Transport Scotland doing to ensure that a whole-network approach is taken to trunk road cycling provision?

Stewart Stevenson: It happens in part for the best possible reasons, in that a piecemeal upgrade of the road network can be necessary in dealing with such matters appropriately, and we do not wish to lose the opportunity to put in cycling provision. However, that does not necessarily mean that there is cycling provision at either end

of an upgraded road, and some of the issues that have been raised relate to that.

However, it is clear that we are seeking to create the maximum possible continuous cycling provision. The A9, for example, has substantial, long cycling sections. I will pick a few examples of schemes in relation to which cycling provision has been considered: the Harthill footbridge over the M8; the scheme at Glenairlie on the A76; the schemes at Barfil and Planting End on the A75; and the elimination of the last section of single-track trunk road on the A830—the road to the isles. There is a long list; a lot is going on in the context of trying to ensure that we join up provision and deliver.

15:45

Alison McInnes: It is commendable that Transport Scotland considers cycling provision in relation to new routes, but provision is of little use if it is patchy, as you said. Some committee members went to Dumfries, where they heard about such problems. I want to explore how Transport Scotland can go the extra mile, by being flexible about funding and acknowledging that if provision is to be made consideration must be given to connections into the local road network.

Perhaps when Transport Scotland decides to undertake work it should talk to regional transport partnerships and councils at an earlier stage, so that work programmes can be co-ordinated and, if councils intend to spend money on cycling, budgets can be aligned. What are your thoughts on that?

Stewart Stevenson: There is considerable focus on ensuring that Transport Scotland co-operates and collaborates with local authorities. We are also working with Sustrans on the national cycle network, to ensure that destinations on the network are prioritised as we make changes to the road network and carry out associated works. There is perhaps more co-ordination than your question suggests that there is—and it works pretty well, by and large.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Charlie Gordon and I visited Dumfries, where we saw cycle lanes that end where a piece of upgraded trunk road comes to an end. There appears to be no flexibility, for example to allow for a slight increase in yardage to get a lane to a local junction or to allow for a commonsense approach to how Transport Scotland's scheme will work in practice. Could the issue be considered?

Stewart Stevenson: It could certainly be considered and I am sure that Transport Scotland will take note of what the committee says. It is often surprisingly difficult to complete the land acquisitions that are associated with road network

changes—I know of cases in which that was the difficulty. I want to ensure that we get the maximum return for our road engineering mobilisation. There is a big cost attached to going out and doing almost nothing, so if we have taken the hit and decided to do a piece of work I want to ensure that we can deliver the maximum possible at incremental cost.

Alison McInnes: On the lack of integration between modes, concern has been expressed to the committee about the poor standard of cycle parking at railway stations. What is Transport Scotland doing to ensure that ScotRail and Network Rail improve the situation?

Stewart Stevenson: As a minimum, there is provision of a Sheffield stand at every railway station in Scotland—the situation south of the border is well behind the situation in Scotland in that regard. Quite a few secure parking areas have been rolled out, particularly at stations that are used by a reasonable number of cyclists. I usually travel from Huntly station, where there is secure parking.

Part of the franchise agreement with FirstGroup involved improving provision for cycle parking at stations. Only two of our stations are Network Rail stations, and I think that two are East Coast mainline stations—I do not want to be held to the latter comment, but there are certainly a couple of East Coast stations, such as Dunbar. The rest of them are essentially under the control of ScotRail. We have done quite a lot there. We have also upgraded the on-board facilities on our railway network.

Alison McInnes: There has been local criticism of a lack of integration between villages and their stations in terms of cycling provision. When investment goes into a new station, surely a little extra investment for that should be sought as well.

Stewart Stevenson: I merely make the point that no one has previously made that point to me. I am happy to receive specific requests. We have between 15 and 18 stations in the pipeline. If there are specific concerns about any of those, I would like to hear them, and my response will follow.

The Convener: Is there any qualitative assessment of provision for cyclists in stations? I am thinking of, for example, whether someone has to carry their bike up a set of stairs to get to the platform before they can lock it up and whether provision for cyclists is conveniently designed and well maintained. Is any assessment carried out of the stations in Scotland to determine whether such provision is of a high quality?

Stewart Stevenson: We have a much-envied inspection regime on the railways—the service quality incentive regime. I do not know whether cycling facilities form part of that. I will inquire and

get back to you on that subject. I have had the SQUIRE inspection extended to cover one or two other things. I do not want to make any promises, but I will inquire about it and let you know.

I make the general point that the accessibility of our stations is a bigger issue than simply their accessibility to cyclists. At a substantial number of our stations, there are issues for people of restricted mobility. The responsibility for disability access lies with Westminster, but Transport Scotland determines how the DFT money from the access for all scheme is spent at railway stations in Scotland—what the priorities are for which stations. However, the rate of progress is such that it will be many decades before the programme is complete. When we tackle that, we are likely to improve the environment for cyclists as well, as the work often involves removing steps that are a barrier for cyclists as they are for people of restricted mobility.

The Convener: I recognise the wider accessibility issue, especially for stations where an external staircase must be climbed to reach the platform. However, provision of a lockable cycle stand for those who have to leave a bike at one end of their journey is perhaps an easier modification to make.

If you could provide that information on the SQUIRE assessment in time for us to consider it as we prepare our report, that would be greatly appreciated.

Stewart Stevenson: I certainly hope to do so. There are certain constraints, which I am trying to remember. At one of the request stops on the line out to Kyle of Lochalsh that sees fewer than 100 passengers a year, the Sheffield stands were sited on the platform, which was up some steps. However, it was clear that there was nowhere else to put them—it is a tiny platform that serves a single door on the train. There are constraints of that character on certain parts of the network.

The Convener: Okay. Let us move on.

Rob Gibson: I would like to continue the questioning on cycle stacking on trains. At our last meeting, we heard from witnesses from the transport partnerships, including Frank Roach and Alex Macaulay. I asked about doubling the amount of space for cycles on trains, but they were a bit dubious about that. Is there no better way of stacking cycles on our trains than the horizontal method that we use just now, which restricts the number of cycles that can be carried?

Stewart Stevenson: The member has asked me a technical question that I am not sure I am equipped to answer. I have not been made aware of an alternative. What we are seeking to do on the trains, as a matter of principle, is to have space that is multipurpose. Among those who

travel on trains are people with wheelchairs and mothers and fathers with buggies, and is helpful to provide space to accommodate them.

On certain routes on the railway network we operate a booking system, because it is necessary to book space in advance. Being a Highland member, Rob Gibson will be aware that cycling tourism in the summer puts particular pressure on the network, such that it is unlikely that we could ever support unconstrained demand. We are trying to improve, but if there are technical means of getting more cycles on trains, I am happy to hear about them, although they have not been put to me yet.

Rob Gibson: Given that the next franchise period is coming round, it might be an idea to think about multipurpose spaces. Will the minister assure us that that will happen? In my experience, it is not often that buggies, disabled people and bicycles all require space at the same time, although I am sure that that happens.

Stewart Stevenson: It is precisely because they do not require space at the same time that a flexible shared space is quite a good approach. However, I am happy to take that point on board. Although I will not commit to any particular outcome before the officials who run the franchise have considered the matter, I am happy to ensure that they do consider it.

Rob Gibson: I move on to a different mode of transport—long-distance bus and coach services. As far as I know, even though such services are subsidised by the taxpayer, there are no means of carrying bikes on buses and coaches. Why is that? What could the Scottish Government do to change the situation?

Stewart Stevenson: If you go to the Traveline Scotland website, you will find that it includes information—although perhaps not a complete picture—on bus and coach services that provide space for cycles. For example, the 34 between Aviemore and Grantown, the 15 between Inverness, Grantown and Aviemore, and the 342 from Lairg to Tain can each carry one cycle. That is perhaps better than not being able to carry any cycles at all, and at least the information is available, as are details of where to track down further information. In many parts of Scotland, Stagecoach provides services for cycles, as does Scottish Citylink, provided that the cycles are in a box or a bag.

Rob Gibson: In other words, you are advocating the use of folding bikes if people wish to carry them on buses.

Stewart Stevenson: I am not advocating anything; I am merely reporting the current availability. Clearly, if there is limited space for passengers, baggage and appurtenances, the

more effectively cycles are packed, the more we can get on.

Rob Gibson: What is the Government going to do to create more possibilities for people to take bikes with them?

Stewart Stevenson: To correct one thing that was said, the Government does not provide the primary support for buses. Support via the bus service operators grant comes through the DFT, but we provide the funding and set the rules for Scotland, such as on the rate per mile. We are looking to change the nature of the scheme to be more environmentally focused than simply focusing on turning the wheels of the bus—whether or not there are passengers on it—but there is relatively little scope. Your point could be an issue for local authorities, which support many bus services, especially in rural areas, in their contracts with bus companies. However, we should bear in mind the fact that the life of a bus is 15 or even 20 years, so it could be significantly expensive to re-engineer buses to provide such new facilities. Even with considerable energy, it might take a while to make a difference. In the meantime, we are focused on ensuring that information is available to prospective bus-riding cyclists.

16:00

Rob Gibson: Bus pass holders could have a 15-to-20-year lifespan too, and they may well be cyclists. Should we think ahead now about making that type of service available?

Stewart Stevenson: I echo such optimism about the life expectancy of those of us who, like Rob Gibson, currently have a bus pass; I hope that his expectations are correct. His point is certainly worth considering—I am not aware that we are currently engaging on that issue.

Rob Gibson: The issue of cyclists' safety—or perceived safety—has been a major barrier to people choosing to cycle. How does the Scottish Government intend to address those concerns?

Stewart Stevenson: Safety was one of the clear issues that came out of our consultation on the cycling action plan. The speed of other traffic was a cause of particular concern. Where local authorities have exercised their powers to implement 20mph zones in areas where, among other things, there is a higher density of cyclists, it has generally been thought to be helpful. There is now a 20mph limit outside 90 per cent of our schools, which has been particularly helpful—along with restrictions on parking—in encouraging students to walk and cycle to school.

People who cycle are increasingly taking specific actions to address their own safety, such

as wearing safety helmets, although that is not compulsory, and we do not necessarily believe that it should be. We are examining the responses to our cycling action plan consultation, and considering what further sensitivities can be introduced in drivers' minds as part of driver training, with regard to treating cyclists with respect and making them feel safe. We do not have direct control over driver training, but we are working with the Westminster bodies that have responsibility for it.

Rob Gibson: COSLA supported the idea of undertaking additional research into how other countries deal with higher numbers of cyclists and with liability resting with drivers rather than cyclists, such that, in the first instance, the driver of a vehicle is deemed to be liable in the case of an accident. I know that you have just said that you do not have control over that area, but does the Scottish Government support such research? Would you seek through advocacy a change in the law in that respect?

Stewart Stevenson: It is clear that issues of liability are complex. We do not directly have a view on that, but we have considered the issue. It is evident that there is a mix of responsibilities—for example, we cannot disconnect the roads authority from having responsibility in certain circumstances.

Creating a legal presumption one way or the other would cause difficulties. Scots law is much more about looking at the facts of the circumstances, so, whether civil or criminal law is applied in the circumstances of adverse interactions between four-wheeled traffic and two-wheeled traffic, it is quite hard to identify the specific changes to the law that one might make without cutting across many of the principles of Scots law. At the end of the day, changing the law is one thing; the more important thing is changing road users' habits and the respect, regard and space that larger vehicles give to two-wheeled vehicles. That goes back to training.

Rob Gibson: But do I take it that, in principle, you would be happy to support further research into this matter?

Stewart Stevenson: Research is always useful if it informs us about key public matters. However, I return to the limited—if not absolutely zero—capability that we have to respond directly to that agenda by changing the legislative environment.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I turn to the cycling action plan, which you have already mentioned. How does the Government intend to monitor the effectiveness of the plan? Will it be reviewed regularly to see how the Government is doing, particularly in relation to the 10 per cent modal share target?

Stewart Stevenson: When we set ourselves targets we have to ensure that we make the necessary progress and identify any blockages en route that will create difficulties for us. We are setting a monitoring framework around this, although that will, of course, depend on what we put in the final version of the cycling action plan for Scotland, which we have just consulted on. The committee's work can help to inform what ultimately ends up in the final version of the plan. In carrying out monitoring, we will work with our partners in COSLA.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: You mentioned the consultation on the plan. A number of the organisations that responded have also given evidence to the committee. The vast majority of responses seem to be from people who are already cycling or walking. What has been done to ensure that we get information from non-cyclists, so that we address what they want, rather than just speaking to the people who have already bought into the agenda?

Stewart Stevenson: Karen Furey can enlighten us on that.

Karen Furey: Over the summer of 2008, Cycling Scotland carried out a massive public consultation exercise. The document that we produced for consultation was based on the feedback that was received. We tried to put in our consultation what the public told us they wanted. We talked to non-cyclists as well as cyclists. Most of the focus groups comprised non-cyclists. There were nine focus groups throughout the country, from north to south—I think that there was even one in Stornoway. There were 4,000 phone interviews and 6,000 online questionnaires, which Cycling Scotland sent out. We got a lot of initial feedback in 2008 from non-cyclists.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: You have heard from Cathy Peattie about some of the lessons that members learned when they were in Copenhagen as part of the active travel inquiry. What has the Government done to ensure that it has also learned from other countries, whether England or countries on the continent, so that we can borrow best practice from what is already happening?

Karen Furey: We are in constant contact with our colleagues at the DFT and Cycling England. The smarter choices, smarter places project manager in our team, Ian Maxwell, visits the demo towns down south. Our project was based on the good practice from the demo towns and improving on it. The big difference was that we did our baseline monitoring right at the beginning—our colleagues in England are now carrying out baseline monitoring in their 11 new projects. We have constant dialogue with other people who have been there and done it before. We try to

improve by taking on board the feedback from other countries.

Marlyn Glen: I want to take that answer a bit further, if you do not mind. Cycling England, as you heard, told us about the successes in its demonstration cities and towns. What early assessments have been carried out of the smarter choices, smarter places project in Scotland, and how will that experience influence decisions on the cycling action plan for Scotland?

Stewart Stevenson: We have the seven successful proposals that we announced in 2008, which cover a significant number of different areas. Most of the early work was on infrastructure. Clearly, outcomes were set for each project, and they were part of the reason why we financed the projects. As they come to completion, we will look at whether the projects have achieved their outcomes. The projects are diverse. For example—I will be corrected if I am wrong—I recall that the Dundee city project involves providing cycles to people. Is that correct?

Karen Furey: It is a cycle library.

Stewart Stevenson: That cycle library is a distinct intervention that is different from the others and we will examine it to see how it changes people's habits in Dundee, which I imagine will be of particular interest to Marlyn Glen. There will therefore be no single outcome for the package of projects; the individual projects will have their own outcomes, which of course will inform future policy making and actions. We have a budget of £0.75 million for monitoring and baseline surveys to ensure that lessons are learned.

Marlyn Glen: It was interesting to listen to the witness from Cycling England, who concentrated on short urban trips, because of congestion difficulties and pollution. What role do you see active travel playing in meeting the targets that are set out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009? Cycling England seemed to concentrate on that aspect.

Stewart Stevenson: It is clear that, if we moved 50 per cent of journeys of 3km or less out of cars and on to more sustainable transport, primarily cycling and walking, that would make a huge contribution to tackling climate change. It would also make a huge difference if we got a third of people who make journeys of 5km or less by car out of their cars. We know that, if we persuade parents to let their children walk or cycle to school rather than go in the family car, that not only benefits the health of the child and improves the percentage for active travel to school, but makes the parent less likely to travel to work in the car. There is therefore a series of interlocking benefits from focussing on getting people out of their cars for very short journeys, so we will focus on that.

Rob Gibson: We were informed in Copenhagen that the local authority provides bicycles for workers such as care workers to get to homes. In addition, if they have to climb hills, they get battery-assisted bicycles. Would that be a good way to encourage modal shift for local government workers and set a lead for the rest of the population? Certainly, the improved battery-assisted bicycles that we saw might be a way forward for more healthy cycling and for assistance on hills, such as in the Hilltown in Dundee.

Stewart Stevenson: The member pinpoints something that is of course relevant to the issue. Copenhagen is relatively flat, as indeed is the Netherlands, which is a country with a substantial cycling population. It is certainly interesting to think about the potential for battery-assisted bicycles. Yesterday, as I was on the bus from Victoria Quay to Waverley station, I passed Karen Furey going up Leith Walk on her cycle. Seeing the struggle that was required to go up the hill—even for that expert, experienced and regular cyclist—did not particularly incentivise me to get off the bus and on to a cycle. Battery assistance is certainly interesting, and we are happy to examine it.

The Convener: My final supplementary question follows Marlyn Glen's question about the climate change targets. In your answer to her, you acknowledged that active travel's contribution to cutting emissions will depend on whether active travel journeys are additional leisure journeys or displace short car journeys, shopping journeys and longer commuting journeys. Is the final cycling action plan intended to be clear about the journeys that will make up the 10 per cent modal share, if it is achieved, and therefore about the target's quantitative contribution to cutting emissions?

Stewart Stevenson: You will recognise that you have asked me what will be in a document that we have not completed, so of necessity I will dodge the question, to an extent. However, we will consider the points that you have raised as we produce the cycling action plan for Scotland.

The Convener: In that case, I will leave it there. I see that members have no more questions for the minister, so I thank him for attending.

I suspend the meeting for a short comfort break before item 3, for which different officials will join the minister.

16:16

Meeting suspended.

16:20

On resuming—

Subordinate Legislation

Loch Ryan Port (Harbour Empowerment) Order 2009

The Convener: Item 3 is subordinate legislation. We will take evidence on the Loch Ryan Port (Harbour Empowerment) Order 2009 and hear again from Stewart Stevenson, who is still with us from the previous item. He is joined by officials: Alastair Wilson, who is deputy director for aviation, ports, freight and canals at the Scottish Government—he must have a very large business card for that job title—and Jacqueline Pantony, who is principal legal officer for justice and communities at the Scottish Government. I welcome them to the committee.

The order is an affirmative instrument. Therefore, the Parliament is required to approve it before its provisions come into force. Under item 4, we will be invited to consider a motion to approve it but, under this item, we are simply taking evidence. I invite the minister to make any introductory remarks that he wishes to lead the evidence on the order.

Stewart Stevenson: I will make some brief remarks. In view of our previous interactions, I start by saying that Stena Line Ports (Loch Ryan) Limited estimates that the new operation and proposed new vessels will result in a 22.5 per cent reduction in CO₂ emissions for the journeys that are made across the channel to Northern Ireland. It is an investment of some £200 million over the long term, which safeguards 500 local jobs and is expected to bring in 100 additional jobs during construction.

The ferry operations from the south-west of Scotland to Northern Ireland are an important part of our infrastructure and are equally a vital part of Northern Ireland's transport infrastructure. They are a matter on which, from time to time, we have discussions with our colleagues across the water.

I am happy to take the committee's questions.

Alison McInnes: You spoke about new jobs that the new terminal would create, and I recognise the benefits of increased freight capacity and reduced journey times that it will bring about, but I am concerned about the impact that it might have on Stranraer town centre. Has the Government considered mitigation measures to assist Stranraer to cope with the loss of visitors that might result from the project? Scottish Enterprise originally had plans to invest in the town centre but, with the changes in the agency that your Government has brought about, it now

considers that to be a local investment, not a national one. Will you talk about that?

Stewart Stevenson: I understand that the local council is anxious for the project to go ahead because it will free up space in the centre of town. Rather than considering it to be a commercial development that prevents the development of the town centre, the council regards it as beneficial to Stranraer's economy.

Stranraer is, of course, distant from many of the centres of Scotland. Associated and running in parallel with the development are a range of road interventions to improve connections from Carlisle and Glasgow to Stranraer—basically the A75 and A77—because we recognise that the project will increase traffic. That is why the strategic transport projects review referred to our activities in the area and the national planning framework also referred to the project.

It is clear that there is substantial local support for the project. Local people certainly hope that it will proceed.

Charlie Gordon: Following on from Alison McInnes's question, I want to ask about the train service to and from Stranraer. Can we be assured that there will be no diminution in the service? With regard to the future shape of the ScotRail franchise, will the minister keep an open mind about opportunities to improve the service?

Stewart Stevenson: Currently, the number of people who arrive at the port by rail is of the order of 53,000. Stena is looking to ensure that there is a bus connection between the rail head and the new port so that rail can remain an important part of the transport infrastructure that supports the ferry operation.

Clearly, the waterfront project is designed to bring more people to Stranraer, and I am absolutely clear that a continuing rail service will be an important part of assisting that process. After all, the savings that might be made by closing or reducing the rail service would be minimal by comparison with the costs of creating new services and new stations. Therefore, it seems very likely that we will wish to sustain the existing service—I certainly wish to do so.

The Convener: If the development goes ahead, a future Scottish Administration will need to look at the economic viability of the existing rail service when deciding whether it should continue to be allowed to decline as part of, for example, any subsequent changes to the franchise. Has any modelling been done on the expected impact on the demand for the rail service to Stranraer? Might that calculation result in a different conclusion in future from what we might wish today?

Stewart Stevenson: I am not aware of our having modelled that, but I can check. However, I expect the traffic figures to move in an upward rather than downward direction, given that Stena's investment in larger vessels will increase capacity—

The Convener: Perhaps I did not explain my question properly. I was talking about the rail service to Stranraer, and I think that the bulk of its passengers currently travel to the port.

Stewart Stevenson: That is correct, but I do not think that there is any suggestion that the people who travel to the ferry by train are likely to cease travelling by train. A bus connection to the ferry port will meet the trains and ferries, so the rail service will still be a very good way of getting to the ferry. Clearly, a substantial proportion of those 53,000 people are making a relatively long train journey, so a bus journey at the end will be relatively incidental for them. I see no particular reason why we should fear a diminution in patronage levels.

Indeed, given that the ferry service will have a greater capacity to carry passengers, goods and lorries, I assume that the marginal cost of providing the ferry service for passengers will diminish. In addition, given that both P&O and Stena operate from Cairnryan, the ferry service operates in a competitive environment. I would expect more passengers to travel on the route and, hence, that there will be increased opportunities for rail to gain additional patronage.

The Convener: The people who live in Stranraer will also be concerned about the rail connections that they enjoy at present. If the bulk of that rail traffic no longer needs to go to Stranraer, is there not a danger that the people of Stranraer will face a reduced service in future?

Stewart Stevenson: No, I suggest quite the opposite. I would expect the number of passengers who use Stranraer railway station to increase rather than to diminish.

Cathy Peattie: I am interested in article 7, "Power to dredge", which appears in part 2 of the order. I appreciate that the order deals with the initial construction, but I want to ask whether the viability of the project relies on a power to dredge regularly. I understand that dredging powers are an issue in the Marine (Scotland) Bill, and I know that an opportunity to dredge regularly is required in some areas. Is there any stipulation about that? I note that ministers have approved procedures for dredging.

I know that that is an anorak question.

16:30

Stewart Stevenson: Let me give you a slightly anorak answer, while others look for something of

another character. One of the original objectors was the gentleman with the oyster farm, which is the oldest natural oyster farm in Scotland and perhaps even further afield. He has now withdrawn his objection because of the work that has been done to diminish the environmental impact of the whole build and operation. The fact is that we have been able to satisfy the various regulators and the individual whose commercial interests are affected; that tells us something about the wider environmental impact.

I accept that that does not answer directly the question how often we would have to dredge to keep the port going—

Cathy Peattie: Yes, because of the environmental impact.

Stewart Stevenson: I am not sure that I have a direct answer to the question. Given the environmentally sensitive nature of the area, the whole issue of the environment, including the matter you raised, has been considered fully. The fact that the oyster farmer has withdrawn his objection and expects to remain in business is a pretty clear indicator that materials will not be thrown into the water. That is the important thing for him, as his oysters require quite clean water.

I know that I am answering the question indirectly by reference to something else, but I think that I have done so in a way that should give us a reasonable degree of comfort that the environmental issue to which you refer has been addressed, albeit that I cannot pinpoint the answer that you asked for.

Rob Gibson: I return to the issue of rail. I understand that, in their submissions to the strategic transport review, the local authority and local transport partnership called for the reopening of the Carlisle to Stranraer line. That cannot be done immediately, but it has the potential to be a goer in decades to come. Indeed, the proposal might allow modal shift in transporting goods to Northern Ireland.

Stewart Stevenson: Yes, the port of Stranraer is important for the north of England—Carlisle and the area beyond. It is also important not only for the whole of Scotland but for Northern Ireland and traffic to the Republic of Ireland.

This very morning, I was at a meeting that the Freight Transport Association hosted at which some of these issues were discussed. One early idea that is actively under consideration is for freight to go to by rail to Stranraer. It is at an early stage—Government officials are not involved thus far—but it is clear that there is a view that there are commercial opportunities to transport freight by rail to Stranraer.

The industry has not yet raised with me the idea of connecting Stranraer and Carlisle, but I would of course be happy to talk to anyone about that. Cross-border issues would arise, but Andrew Adonis, the Secretary of State for Transport—for the time being, at least—and I are pretty much of a shared mind. The huge and effective co-operation from the DFT during the bad weather indicates the good relationship that we have. If we feel that such a connection is the sort of thing that we need to discuss, we will be able to discuss it.

The Convener: In previous sessions, you have made commitments on the emphasis that the Scottish Government places on rail freight, but some questions appear to remain unresolved. The Government seems to be pushing ahead on the proposal before us without being able to answer questions on the future of rail freight in this area.

Stewart Stevenson: I would not wish you to go away with that view, convener. For example, it is clear that, unlike other parts of the rail network, there are no gauge restraints on the line to Stranraer. Governments have been addressing those constraints over a period of time—the previous Administration cleared the constraints between Dundee and Aberdeen, for example—but it is not thought that there any gauge constraints in this case.

The only issue that arises at Stranraer is the possible provision of an extra siding. A proposal for that has yet to be made to us, although we stand ready to react to it. We have freight facilities grants, which the people who are potentially interested in taking freight to Stranraer are aware of. We have already ensured that they know of our enthusiasm for such developments. At the moment, the proposal is with the people who are actively considering it. We stand ready to support such measures, and I would not wish anyone on the committee to imagine that I have anything other than enthusiasm for them.

The Convener: And also for the new development at Loch Ryan.

Stewart Stevenson: Yes. Remember that both P&O and Stena are involved. The proposal is a commercial matter for the rail operator and whoever it will be—I do not know at this stage which company the freight will be carried by. It has been established, however, how the rail freight will be linked to Cairnryan. That has already been taken account of, and indeed the P&O ferries—

The Convener: Is that what is currently proposed to be done?

Stewart Stevenson: No—in that it is a commercial proposal that is being worked up, and it has not yet been put to Government. I learned of it this morning.

The Convener: That takes us back to the point that I raised earlier. I would have welcomed some clarity around the issues before the proposal for the development was made, rather than simply the Government noting the potential and using phrases like, "It remains to be seen."

Stewart Stevenson: It would make no sense for us to invest in infrastructure that will not be used. Operators may apply for the freight facilities grant to create the infrastructure that they require to support modal shift. For example, investment has been made at Needlefield in Inverness, which has taken 44 Tesco lorries a day off the A9. When that proposal was presented for Stobart Rail to take Tesco dry goods off the road and on to the railway, the appropriate response was made to invest in developing the Needlefield yard. Exactly the same process will apply at Stranraer when there is a viable proposal.

Officials have not yet been approached. It was only because I was at an industry forum that I heard about the proposals. No one has actually approached Government officials or the minister on the subject. I took the opportunity today—as I would always wish to do—to assure those concerned that I want us to make our decisions as quickly as possible and that we are enthusiastic in encouraging the proposals to be progressed.

The Convener: In your opening remarks you spoke about a 22.5 per cent reduction in carbon emissions. That is presumably in the emissions that are directly related to the operation of the Stena boats.

Stewart Stevenson: Correct. That figure derives from a number of factors. There will be newer boats—albeit bigger—so there is a benefit there. The distance steamed will be reduced because the route will start further up the loch. The vessels will be steaming at a lower proportion of the maximum speed, and thus their operation will be more economical. There is a range of ways in which the project will deliver a carbon benefit. I hope that you recognise my point: in this project, as in others, an appreciation and understanding of the carbon impact are a key part of the project.

The Convener: Can you put a figure on the other carbon impacts with respect to onward journeys and the levels of freight and all other kinds of traffic? The emissions that relate directly to the boat are significant, but surely we should also calculate the emissions relating to the rest of any passenger or cargo journey.

Stewart Stevenson: I cannot do that. I have told members what Stena has informed us. It has told us what it believes the emissions reduction will be from its project, and we have no reason to disagree with what it has said.

The Convener: So there has been no attempt to assess the wider impact.

Stewart Stevenson: No.

The Convener: Okay.

As there are no further questions, we move on to agenda item 4, which is formal consideration of motion S3M-5468. I invite the minister to speak to and move the motion.

Stewart Stevenson: There is probably no more that I should say at this stage.

I move,

That the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee recommends that the Loch Ryan Port (Harbour Empowerment) Order 2009 be approved.

The Convener: I suggest that, if members are minded to approve the motion, we should agree to append a recommendation that the Scottish Government produce an assessment of the global carbon impact of the proposal and modelling of future traffic demand. Committee members have asked questions about those matters and the minister has not been able to provide answers to them.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I have a point of clarification, convener. It is perhaps disappointing that you did not ask the minister about the changes that that recommendation would make to the timescale of the project and the delays that it could result in, so that we could get a full understanding of the implications of what you are asking us to approve.

The Convener: The minister will have the opportunity to make a closing statement. Do members have any other comments?

Rob Gibson: The exercise that the convener has suggested would be useful, but it should not necessarily be attached to the order. It would be suitable for us to ask the minister about those matters separately, because the bounds of what the convener suggests that we append to the order are very wide. Shirley-Anne Somerville argued that there could be a slowdown in delivery, which could be a problem for the Parliament. We want such a national project to go ahead as soon as possible.

Charlie Gordon: I am not minded to delay such a significant project, but I do not necessarily disagree with the convener. In a sense, the issue is procedural. A lot depends on whether, in his summing up, the minister acquiesces in the convener's suggestion and proceeding by that or other means. The process of acceding to the request is secondary, in a sense. I am not saying that the procedure that has been suggested is not proper, but there is more than one way to skin a cat.

The Convener: It is within our discretion to approve the order and, in so doing, to request, perhaps by letter, that the minister provide information about a global carbon assessment and traffic modelling. Members have raised those issues.

Alison McInnes: I would like clarity, if you do not mind, convener. Would the committee's approval of the order be conditional on receiving that information or would the information be additional? I would be concerned if the committee's approval of the order was conditional on that information coming forward. That could cause a delay.

The Convener: I would be content for the order to be approved if the minister could provide that information.

16:45

Stewart Stevenson: I would be deeply uncomfortable if the process that is being described were to delay in any way a project that creates jobs. I understand that the company has contractors teed up to start, although I do not know the exact timetable. I am not sure of the practical and legal effects of attaching a recommendation to the motion or indeed the procedure for doing so, but I am sure that the committee clerk will provide appropriate advice.

I will, of course, be happy to respond to members' questions about the project or requests for further information. I point out that we commission the United Kingdom Committee on Climate Change to answer our questions and take the lead on monitoring carbon emissions in Scotland. No intervention, whether it is the one that we are discussing or another, will escape having its carbon impact measured. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 has 100 sections, of which 21 provide for extensive reporting and targets that we must meet. It is clear that the Loch Ryan project, like other projects, is covered by the provisions of the 2009 act.

I am very unclear about the effect of attempting to attach a recommendation to the motion, and I do not know in what form you would do so, but that is a procedural matter for the committee and its advisers as much as it is a matter for me. However, if the committee wants to write to me, I am always willing to respond to its requests.

The Convener: In that case, I will put two separate questions to the committee, in recognition of the fact that they address separate matters: what recommendation on the order the committee wants to make to the Parliament; and whether we want to seek more information from the minister on the issues that I raised.

First, the question is, that motion S3M-5468, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Convener: There will be a division

FOR

Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

The Convener: The result of the division is: For 6, Against 0, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to,

That the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee recommends that the Loch Ryan Port (Harbour Empowerment) Order 2009 be approved.

The Convener: The committee's report to the Parliament will confirm the result of our debate.

Secondly, do members agree to write to the minister to seek further information on outstanding issues?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I thank the witnesses for taking the time to answer questions on the order.

16:47

Meeting continued in private until 17:15.

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