

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Portfolio Question Time

### Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Good afternoon, colleagues. The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio question time, and the portfolio on this occasion is transport, net zero and just transition. Members who wish to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

#### Newburgh Railway Station

**1. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its consideration of the proposal for a railway station in Newburgh, Fife. (S6O-02664)

**The Minister for Transport (Fiona Hyslop):** Transport Scotland officials considered the initial detailed options appraisal for a Newburgh station submitted by the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership and provided feedback.

Although it opted not to take up the offer of a meeting to discuss Transport Scotland's comments on the draft detailed options appraisal report, SEStran provided a revised detailed options appraisal report. That report outlines a number of multimodal options, including a rail station, and is being considered by Transport Scotland, which will provide feedback to SEStran on the revised report during the coming weeks.

**Willie Rennie:** Locals have put years of work into the plan. An appraisal, in line with the Scottish transport appraisal guidance, was submitted in June last year but it took more than six months for Transport Scotland to respond. Suggested changes were made to the plan, which was resubmitted months ago, in June of this year. There is overwhelming and enthusiastic support for a new railway station at Newburgh, so when exactly will a decision be made?

**Fiona Hyslop:** As I said in my first answer, there will be a response in the next few weeks. To be fair, there has been a considerable amount of work by everyone, not least by the community and by those who put forward the options appraisal report. It is clear that SEStran has wanted to revise its proposal at every stage. Although that will make for a better proposal, constantly going back to revise it takes time. In this case, although patience may be a virtue, the people of Newburgh may want to see action sooner rather than later. I understand why the member asks that question.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Willie Rennie is right to say that the project is well supported by the local community. A site has been identified and there are plans to construct a platform at a relatively low cost, but progress has been glacially slow. Will the minister facilitate an early meeting between Transport Scotland and the local community action group so that we can finally see some progress on what would be a very welcome project?

**Fiona Hyslop:** SEStran submitted a report on the project and a revised detailed options appraisal report. As I said, there have been three revisions as part of the process. As the member well knows, the STAG appraisal must be robust and must consider a number of areas. The community case, which has been set out by many, is strong, but there are also financial and economic factors. I know that the member has held finance briefs for his party in the past and that he will know the severe financial constraints that the budget is under, not least because of the failure to provide for inflationary increases on capital budgets for this Government.

Every consideration will be given to the report and a response will be given in a few weeks time.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** The local community has made a really good case for bringing a station back to Newburgh, proposing a low-cost modular station that would be of great benefit. Does the minister agree that the new modular stations have an important role to play in expanding Scotland's rail network and that developing one at Newburgh could be a trailblazer for developments that could benefit other communities?

**Fiona Hyslop:** It is my understanding that modular railway stations have already been used but may not be applicable to every circumstance. If a strong business case is presented for rail intervention, plans must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. If the plan for Newburgh is taken forward, we must consider the fact that modular stations are not suitable for all sites and that the design of any new or altered station must take into account the characteristics of that particular location. Acceptance of the design of station platforms is ultimately a matter for Network Rail, as the infrastructure owner, and ScotRail, as the operator.

#### Local Bus Services

**2. Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last received an update from the traffic commissioner for Scotland on any complaints regarding local bus services. (S6O-02665)