



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Tuesday 3 May 2022

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Tuesday 3 May 2022

CONTENTS

	Col.
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	1
ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN DELIVERING NET ZERO	2
SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION.....	34
The Traffic Signs Amendment (Scotland) Regulations and General Directions 2022 (SSI 2022/111).....	34

NET ZERO, ENERGY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE
14th Meeting 2022, Session 6

CONVENER

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

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

*Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

*Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

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

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Steve Gooding (RAC Foundation)

Ewan Wallace (Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland)

Paul White (Confederation of Passenger Transport)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Peter McGrath

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Tuesday 3 May 2022

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:31]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Dean Lockhart): Good morning, and welcome to the 14th meeting in 2022 of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, which we are conducting in a hybrid format. We have received apologies from Monica Lennon.

Item 1 is a decision on whether to take items 4 and 5 in private. Item 4 is consideration of evidence heard this morning and item 5 is consideration of the committee's approach to an inquiry on ferry services. Do we agree to take those items in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Role of Local Government in Delivering Net Zero

The Convener: Item 2 is an evidence session for our inquiry into the role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net zero Scotland. We launched the inquiry in December, to look into progress at the local government level in achieving national net zero targets. The inquiry is also considering what role the Scottish Government and its agencies can play in supporting local government to deliver those national targets.

We are now in phase 2 of the inquiry, which means that we are looking in depth at some of the key themes that have emerged so far. Today, we turn to transport, and we will hear from a panel of experts on the role of local authorities in helping to decarbonise transport in Scotland.

I am pleased to welcome our panellists, who are joining us remotely. Steve Gooding is the director of the RAC Foundation, Ewan Wallace is the chair of the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland, and Paul White is the director of the Confederation of Passenger Transport Scotland. Good morning, and thank you for taking time out to join the committee. We very much appreciate it.

We have around 70 minutes for this panel. I believe that there are no opening statements, so we will move straight to questions. I will begin with questions about electric vehicles in Scotland.

There are currently around 2,200 public charging points for electric vehicles. The consensus seems to be that Scotland will need around 30,000 by 2030 to support the expected increase in the number of electric vehicles. Earlier this year, the Scottish Government announced that it will provide up to £60 million to local authorities over the next four years to support the roll-out of public charging points for electric vehicles. Is the target of 30,000 by 2030 realistic, and what needs to happen for that target to be reached? Is the £60 million of funding that was announced by the Scottish Government enough, and do local authorities have the necessary resources, capacity and expertise to implement those plans?

I appreciate that there are quite a few questions there, but it would be helpful to have a wide-ranging discussion to kick things off. Let us start with Steve Gooding, followed by Ewan Wallace and then Paul White.

Steve Gooding (RAC Foundation): I feel slightly embarrassed at starting off by saying in answer to your questions that we cannot be absolutely sure—it depends. I say that because of a variety of factors relating to the charging of

electric cars, starting with a pretty basic one. When we talk about the number of chargers, it is very easy to get fixated on whether we need 20,000 or 30,000, but we need to ask ourselves what sort of chargers we are talking about. There is a world of difference, in terms of both performance and the commercial position, between relatively low-speed chargers—for example, we have heard a lot about converting lamp posts to chargers for vehicles that are parked overnight—and rapid chargers that might be fitted in specific rapid charging hubs, which look remarkably like service stations as we think of them today. We will almost certainly need a mix of those in the future.

It is important to have local authorities involved in the debate, because they are best placed to understand the likelihood in any particular location of domestic and business properties having off-street parking where charging can be provided. Our view is that the people who are most likely to go into electric vehicles the soonest are, unsurprisingly, those who can charge them at home. It is the most convenient location and it makes sense economically. If someone has off-street parking at home in a position where they can have a home charger, the chances are that going electric will be a good bet for them. Charging and running an electric vehicle is good value for money, even at current electricity prices, compared with using traditional fossil fuels.

I will add something that members of the committee will know extremely well. One of the key things that we have to think about when we are talking about numbers with any policy such as this is the very different types of location that there are in Scotland. I would draw a very crude comparison between the central belt and the more rural and remote areas. In a report that the RAC Foundation published a couple of years ago, we found that Scotland is perhaps ahead of the rest of the country in the installation of chargers and the ease of their use. One of my colleagues drove the whole length of the north coast 500—a very attractive route—in his purely electric car. We were quite surprised to find that an electric car can be a great option if you live in a rural area and can have a charger at home, although there is a big on-going issue about the reliability of the chargers that are installed.

We will, undoubtedly, need more chargers. We will need a mix of slow and rapid chargers, with rapid chargers in hubs that are convenient for people to access. We will also need to encourage people who can charge electric vehicles at home to do so. In particular, we will need to encourage people to do so in rural areas, where going electric can be more convenient and cost effective than sticking with fossil fuels.

The Convener: Many thanks for that answer—particularly the insight into the one-size-fits-all idea and the idea that it is not just a numbers game but is about the types of charging point. That was very helpful. I am sure that my colleagues will want to come in on some of those issues. Let me address the same question to Ewan Wallace.

Ewan Wallace (Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland): Thank you, and good morning. Steve Gooding has nailed a number of the points that I would certainly have picked up on in terms of what you asked about. We looked closely at the 30,000 figure and how that fits in terms of the public locations, the number of chargers that will be provided by individuals, as Steve said, in their driveways and outside their properties, and the role that businesses will play in providing the locations where vehicles will ultimately access energy. That is how we would break it down.

When SCOTS looked at that figure, we considered it in the same way as we would consider how vehicles currently access petrol and diesel. We looked in a very similar manner at how many locations there are where people can refuel or recharge their vehicles. It is obviously far easier for someone to recharge a vehicle outside their home than it is for them to go and refuel it with petrol or diesel.

We have some really good examples of the practicalities of delivering those locations, particularly in some of our urban settings. Dundee City Council is probably one of the leading councils in Scotland on that because of what it has achieved through good, strong policies and strong leadership at political and, certainly, officer level. It has driven forward really positively the installation of chargers. It has also had good support from the private sector, because companies have seen the opportunity to reduce the costs of operating their vehicle fleets. Dundee City Council is one of the leading lights in the Scottish context.

Over the period, £60 million is a substantial amount of money. We are aware that local authorities are now working closely with the Scottish Futures Trust on the administration of that funding, and 14 pathfinders have been taken forward already. The Scottish Futures Trust is now engaging directly with our society and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the practicalities—it is a two-way thing. We will be able to bring into that discussion what it actually means to put that level of infrastructure into a public streetscape and what the knock-on implications are.

A number of local authorities across Scotland are already developing policy positions on on-street provision, because there are concerns about the sheer volume of on-street charging

locations that we could land up with. Is that the correct way to go? Does that perhaps go against other policies? For example, a local authority might have a policy to reduce the amount of kit within the streetscape, to make it more attractive for cycling and walking. We are working through that in some detail at the moment, and we will bring that work back and share it across all 32 local authorities and seven regional transport partnerships.

The final point that you asked about is the wider resource. Our experiences across Scotland are varied, but one common thing is that the reliability of the kit at the moment is not what it should be, as Steve Gooding said. The issue is about getting access to the right people to keep the facilities running. We have looked at whether it is easier to keep things ticking over in, as Steve said, a large-scale location that is equivalent to a refuelling station. If people choose to go and recharge their vehicle at such a location, they have greater certainty that at least one of the charge points will be available. If they are driving to Lairg, for example, where only two charge points are available, and if one of the charge points is not working and the other already has a vehicle in it, that is where the range anxiety and concerns start to kick in.

We are working hard to share all that knowledge—we are feeding it back into national agencies and sharing it across all our partners.

I am conscious that I have not answered your question about whether the goal of 30,000 chargers is realistic, but I will go with what Steve Gooding said. At this stage, I genuinely do not know. If you were to ask us that question in 12 or 18 months' time, we would have a much better feel for how deliverable that number is.

The Convener: Thank you, Ewan. You have brought out a number of points, and it is good to get that practical perspective. The same question goes to Paul White.

Paul White (Confederation of Passenger Transport): I cannot really speak to car charging or the number of electric cars that we might see, but a number of our points about bus and coach travel mirror a lot of Steve Gooding's points. The issue is the types of charger. There are a number of electric vehicles in the bus and coach fleet, but some vehicles might be fuelled by hydrogen for longer journeys. Are we taking that into consideration?

With regard to car charging, the concern for us, as Ewan Wallace said, is that baking in on-street provision for car charging might impact on other local authority policies around the switch to sustainable, active travel and the provision of bus or cycle lanes.

With regard to our conversations with the likes of the Scottish Futures Trust, the distribution network operators and the energy suppliers, it is worth bearing in mind that the timescales for that type of activity need to be considered, because the DNOs have plans that stretch years into the future. Therefore, the consideration of and conversations about new sites for charging—whether for cars or buses—need to start now if we want to see that progress in the next three years. There are some big challenges ahead for the provision of car and bus charging infrastructure. When it comes to coaches, hydrogen is probably the fuel that will be most attractive for longer journeys. So, if a location does not have hydrogen infrastructure, that location will no longer be accessible by coach. That is worth considering.

09:45

The Convener: Thank you. Those opening remarks set the scene very well. Mark Ruskell has a supplementary question about charging.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I want to ask Ewan Wallace about the consistency of the roll-out of charging infrastructure around the country. In my experience, it is excellent in areas such as Stirling and Dundee but very poor in Edinburgh, and that can build in range anxiety. What progress can be made in having consistent EV infrastructure roll-out? At the moment, we still seem to be in a phase in which the process is being led by local authorities that have a particular interest in the issue, that have sought pathfinder funding and that are forging ahead.

Ewan Wallace: That is at the core of where the 32 authorities and the seven RTPs are. When we map across them, we can see the ones that have taken an early strategic decision. They are looking not only to access the funding that the Scottish Government has made available, but to put in their own capital funding where that is deemed appropriate.

As far as consistency is concerned, the pathfinders will definitely help. Over the past few months, we have had good, positive, detailed discussions with the Scottish Futures Trust. It is overseeing the process and it wants to ensure that we get the necessary level of consistency. We have also had detailed sessions involving local authority engineers from those authorities that have not necessarily been at the forefront of putting in the infrastructure, so that they can learn from others. That is happening right now.

A complicated mapping exercise is under way on what the current provision is in different locations. That work is being shared across authorities. A decision still requires to be taken to

mobilise people to go and do that. The ability to access the £60 million of seed funding means that an authority that is struggling will have a number of options. It can go back to the Scottish Futures Trust to say that it will need more help to develop a programme of activity over the next 12 to 24 months. That might involve going to the market or to one of the other local authorities that have already developed such expertise. That has happened in other sectors that SCOTS has experience in; it is not unusual for help to be provided across boundaries.

There is a recognition of the wider importance of the move to net zero in tackling climate change across the SCOTS membership, and EV charging infrastructure is one of the earliest areas. It is tangible because it often forms part of the fabric of the road network, which means that it becomes very real very quickly. The availability of charging infrastructure impacts on individuals and on the community, and the issue is raised in what comes into the post boxes of elected members at ward level. As well as becoming real very quickly, it becomes positive very quickly, when the infrastructure is put in in the local town centre car park and it becomes available. There is the additional bonus of that being a better place to put in such infrastructure, because it means that people who have chosen to use a private car to access a town centre know that they can recharge their vehicle and go about their business in that area.

It is about joining up the different bits. As a society, we do quite a lot of that. As I said, 12 or 18 months down the line, we will be looking closely at the progress across all the different authorities, and, if there are some that are a little bit behind, SCOTS, the SFT, the Scottish Government and others will be there to help them along the path.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I have a brief supplementary question for Steve Gooding. I want to pick up on the comments that you made earlier. Getting the chargers in place is all well and good, but I read last week that the chief executive officer of Rivian is warning of a battery and materials shortage. I also read that Elon Musk at Tesla is saying that lithium prices are going through the roof. Do you recognise that? If so, have any projections been made of how that will impact the requirement for 30,000 chargers and EV uptake over the next 10 years?

Steve Gooding: That is exactly the right question to ask and a very hard one to answer. You are right to pick up on the fact that there are some difficulties in the supply chain for the creation of batteries. Batteries require lithium and what are called rare earth metals—they are called rare for a reason—and the global supply of those

has been affected by some of the very unfortunate things that are happening around the world at the moment. What we really need is a breakthrough in battery technology. A huge amount of money is being thrown at that, not just in this country but around the world. Without finding different materials from which batteries can be constructed or developing different technology in the construction of batteries, we are probably going to find ourselves running up against constraints in the number of vehicles that are built globally and then allocated to the UK market.

The foundation has done some work with the English Electric Vehicle Energy Taskforce to look at the likely availability and take-up of electric vehicles. All that I can say about that is that there is a wide range of future possibilities, which is why it was so hard to answer the question about the target of 30,000 chargers that the convener posed at the beginning of the meeting.

The likelihood is that we will see more and more models coming to market. The auto companies are investing hugely. We have seen Volkswagen put a lot of money into its own battery manufacturing capability. We are also seeing investment in this country that is Government supported. At the moment, it does not look as though the batteries themselves are the constraint; rather, the constraint is a global shortage of semiconductors and wiring looms, which were, until very recently, a major export from Ukraine. There are uncertainties there.

I will add one further thought that harks back to a previous point. We need to think about the cars, but we also need to think about commercial vehicles—I am not talking just about buses. When we are thinking about charge points, we need to think about vans and other vehicles that enable our towns and cities to function, such as minicabs and taxis, if people are to be encouraged out of their private cars and on to different forms of mass transit, perhaps in smaller vehicles. We need to think about how they are going to be serviced, too.

Some of the differences between local authorities, in terms of the numbers of chargers and their locations, might come down to deciding whether it is better to encourage people with cars to switch to electric or to encourage people not to own their own car but to use a mix of public transport and perhaps to join a car club for the occasional longer trip that they need to make. I am sure that we will get on to that.

Liam Kerr: That is fascinating. Thank you.

The Convener: Paul White also wanted to come in on that question.

Paul White: I just want to reiterate that point in relation to the bus sector, where the rarity of certain parts in the manufacturing process is

impacting on price. The model of bus funding to allow us to transition to net zero is based on the cost of the vehicle reducing and the benefits of switching to electric vehicles as opposed to paying for diesel. The price of the vehicle is not reducing and the cost of juicing your vehicle is increasing, so it is difficult to stack up the business case for accelerated investment to net zero because of the rarity of certain elements that are required for those vehicles.

The Convener: I want to follow up on the initial discussions from a local authority perspective. We have heard about the benefits of local authorities having local knowledge, which will be vital in delivering net zero. I will explore some of the highlights. Mark Ruskell spoke about consistency across local authorities. There are 32 local authorities in Scotland. Are consistent technologies likely to be used across them? Is consistency hardwired into the system or is there a risk that local authorities might use different technologies, resulting in some confusion?

I have a related question about economies of scale. Are local authorities adopting individual procurement policies on net zero or is there some pooling of resources, with authorities benefiting from economies of scale in procuring equipment that I assume is expensive?

Ewan Wallace: I will answer on the procurement model first. Local authorities heavily use framework-type contracts, which are often administered by Scotland Excel. That approach has been in place for some years now for vehicle procurement for our fleets—it might even be in its third iteration.

More recently, developmental work has been done to address procurement of the type of kit that is to be deployed on street around and within car parks. Anyone who uses an electric vehicle will see that there is a variety of types of charger, which have changed year on year. The size of each charger and the number of cables coming out of it can vary from place to place.

The Scottish Futures Trust is working with us on that. There are some parts of Scotland where negotiating as good a price as possible for bringing the kit to a location and installing it is already on the radar of the joint procurement teams. We need to address the procurement of the kit, the installation process and the maintenance. Work on that is being developed at the moment, which will be shared through the SFT and Scotland Excel so that any local authority can tap into that expertise and not have to reinvent it.

The maintenance regime for the kit is also part of the procurement. The potential for any contract to have an operating part would also be considered so that maintenance does not fall to a

set of local authority officers who might already be looking after other pieces of equipment, such as the street lighting network, which is where the skills often sit. The requirements of looking after such kit often mean that the council requires to gain access to a specialist contractor. That takes us back to the question of rural versus urban for locations that are at the end of the supply chain or further away. That needs to be built into the contractual arrangements as well.

Work is going on to develop that. For instance, those contracts would tend to be updated every two or three years. A framework contract that an authority can dip into might be for three years, and such contracts will be reviewed regularly. Practitioners tend to feed into an overall group that feeds back its experiences of working under the contract so that it can be improved the next time around.

I do not know whether that addresses your questions about improving technology in the future and dealing with the scale and the procurement challenge.

10:00

The Convener: Yes, that is helpful. I will clarify a couple of points. You mentioned framework agreements for procurement that allow local authorities to achieve economies of scale. Correct me if I am wrong, but they sound optional in nature. They are not necessarily hardwired in; it is not that local authorities must use them. Roughly what percentage of local authorities use those procurement frameworks to ensure consistency and achieve economies of scale?

Ewan Wallace: You are correct, convener. They are not a must-do; they are optional. It is down to the individual authority to take a policy position on that. Some authorities might decide that they will support the collaborative approach through Scotland Excel and will go there as their first choice to see what value it gives them. However, the alternative of undertaking a separate procurement exercise is always available.

There might be two or three authorities outwith the Scotland Excel model. I am afraid that I do not have any statistics that would give you a feel for how many authorities currently use framework contracts. However, we can take that away and come back. We can ask around our network about the current usage of framework contracts for vehicle procurement and the installation of EV charging infrastructure.

The Convener: That would be great—I would very much appreciate that.

Steve Gooding wants to come in.

Steve Gooding: You asked about the technologies. It is important that we consider that question through the lens of the citizen—the user: that is, the driver or whoever is looking after the vehicle—as well as the lens of the local authority, which is trying to secure best value for public investment.

From the user perspective, there is definitely a push from national Government in England to ensure that charge points are as easy to engage with as possible. That involves a mix of reliability—we have talked about that a bit—and recognising the fact that, if I go to fill up my old petrol car, I can go to a service station and use my credit card. I do not need to have a particular loyalty card or connect with my mobile phone; I can just turn up, fill up the tank, pay and be on my way again. However, that has not been the case to date with many of the publicly available charge points. Therefore, we need greater consistency.

On whether the technology behind the screen—the technology behind the kit—needs to be consistent, the most important thing is that it needs to work consistently. One of the challenges that has arisen is that not all of what is, in effect, version 1 of public chargers, which many of us are familiar with, were designed to be particularly user friendly, and not all of them have turned out to be particularly reliable. We now need investment to replace those with the next generation of chargers, which, by and large, are better, but we also need to have a better-informed view of where they should go.

Many of the chargers that were installed originally in Scotland and around the UK were installed in places where they could be put—such as car parks that local authorities owned—rather than in the places where people who have electric cars are most likely to use them. If people can use a rapid charger to recharge their vehicles in about 20 minutes, why not think about where people go for about 20 to 30 minutes? We are just developing that thinking. One such place is the supermarket, so instead of having free-to-use slow chargers as a side benefit at supermarkets, maybe we should think about supermarket car parks as being among the best locations for rapid chargers in future.

The Convener: In the context of supermarkets, the concept of permitted developments has been important for achieving a fast roll-out. Perhaps we can come back to that point, because I now want to bring in Fiona Hyslop.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): Good morning, and thank you for joining us. I want to ask about local authorities and how they can best support the delivery of integrated public and active travel networks. Do they have a role? What should

that role be in co-ordinating information flows, ticketing and the development of transport hubs?

I will come first to Ewan Wallace. To bring the issue to life, could you reflect on what that means for cities and for semi-rural areas? For example, cities have multimodal challenges, and in relation to semi-rural areas, there are proposals for park and rides on the M8 at the Heartlands junction and at the new junction at Winchburgh on the M9. Should that be the role of the local authority or of the transport partnership?

I will then ask Paul White to talk about the role of integrated transport hubs from a bus perspective, before inviting Steve Gooding to reflect on what he expects in relation to cars and park and ride, and to relate that to the concept of shared electric vehicles, which he referred to earlier.

Ewan Wallace: There are a couple of issues there. One strength that we have as a network is that we include the seven regional transport partnerships and all 32 local authorities. That is partnership working for delivering things at a large scale. The two sites that you mentioned clearly fall within national, regional and local delivery remits. I do not know whether they are included in the bus partnership fund proposals for those locations. If they are, that automatically means that the local authorities and the regional transport partnerships will already be working on those types of developments.

With my day-job hat on, I can say that that is the case in the north-east of Scotland for those types of large-scale passenger transport interchanges that allow people to go to a central location and know that they can then change from one bus service to another, or cycle or walk to the location and get on to public transport.

The design of what have traditionally been seen as park-and-ride sites has evolved over a number of years off the back of local authorities' experience of working with the passenger transport operating companies in their areas and the experience of what has worked at a national and a regional level. Over the past 10 to 15 years, a lot of sites have been developed that have good information, good facilities and a safe environment that gives people the confidence to wait to access transport services.

Everyone inputs to the design functions, but who leads on that undoubtedly varies across Scotland. Funding has come through the local authority side of things when there has been a successful bid for national funding. When it comes to regional transport partnerships, with the exception of the bigger ones such as Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, the level of capital funding that is required to create large-scale

integrated hubs in city regions is such that funding from national Government is often relied on to make those happen. We can be talking about sums of £10 million, £15 million or £20 million for developing the bigger sites. A partnership approach is absolutely necessary for those types of things.

In a more rural setting, across the 32 authorities, some have developed integrated hubs or interchange opportunities. Those tend to have smaller amounts of parking on a key corridor to allow people to access a mainline bus service. Typically, those hubs—well, the ones that I have seen—allow people to cycle or walk and have good cycle parking. A couple of locations that I can think of now have EV charge points, which would be part of the design criteria.

Local authorities often think about what other facilities they should have at those locations, if people are to gather there. Therefore, there will be things such as information boards for the local community and waste collection points, because the sites are easy places to go to and from. Local authorities have the ability to think about what else the community needs. Where a local authority is going to use an area of land, it will try to put in as many of those things as possible.

Such sites are an emerging area of work, and you will start to see them pop up. The area has been identified in the national transport strategy, and I think that we will start to see hubs emerge at a strategic level across Scotland on the back of revised regional transport strategies. After the elections, I am sure that they will start to emerge, as they are the type of thing that lots of communities will look to develop.

I took a couple of notes as you went through your points, and I think that I have covered most of the elements in your question.

Fiona Hyslop: That is helpful.

I will bring in Paul White on the role of local authorities in co-ordinating information for transport hubs from a bus perspective. What more should they be doing?

Paul White: They play a key role. As Ewan Wallace said, a partnership approach is needed. My sector is a big advocate of integrated transport hubs, and we strongly advocated for those in our evidence to the national planning framework inquiry.

Through the bus partnership fund, £500 million has been allocated to fund bus service improvements, speed up buses and generally improve bus running times. It is possible to form bus service improvement partnerships, in which a local authority and bus operators come together to consider a range of local service improvements.

Although “bus” features heavily in the name, the idea is to take a holistic view and to encourage active travel by including walking and cycling in the grander vision for the local authority.

Within that, a partnership might look for an operator to invest in new vehicles, and the partners might consider how to deliver integrated travel and provide information. Good work is ongoing with Traveline Scotland to expand that valuable resource to include further information on fares and where tickets can be bought. Good work is being done in Glasgow, whereby operators are looking at capping the level of payment per day, which is the model that already exists in London.

Those are things that you can look to deliver in partnership. For us, the bus service improvement partnership is the best model, because you can consider such issues and take a holistic approach. For example, you can consider how people access buses but, as Ewan Wallace said, you can also provide safe parking for bikes and walking routes to get there. The role of the local authority is to look at where facilities can be sited and take a strategic approach that delivers bus improvement alongside improvements for walking and cycling. That means that you are looking at the top tiers of the sustainable transport hierarchy and delivering for bus users as well as for cyclists, walkers and wheelers.

Fiona Hyslop: Thank you. Can Steve Gooding answer the question about integrated transport hubs from a car perspective?

10:15

Steve Gooding: Certainly. It is very important, but I would go a step further. The role of local authorities is not just to put all the different aspects of transport on the page at the one time and to think about those; taking a step back from that, as we all know, transport is a derived demand, and it is the job of local authorities to ensure that we can access employment, education and services. To some extent, it is also about having those things come to us, which is increasingly needed these days. As a result of the severe challenges of Covid over the past few years, a lot of us have learned that we can get things delivered to our homes and that we can work from home, and that has had an impact on the commuter market and on access to retail.

We need to think about whether that situation will continue. For example, do the Scottish Government and local authorities actively want to encourage people not to go to their office jobs from 9 to 5, five days a week? They might go into the office for one, two or three days a week. I stress that not only because it is important for bus and rail services, but because it relates to the

question of whether we want people to be travelling or whether, as someone from another body that is giving evidence to the committee has suggested, it would be better to spend rather more money on good signal and connectivity, which would make it easier for people to work from home. That has happened to quite a large extent in France.

That relates to the question that you posed about the scope for park-and-ride facilities and car clubs. If people are trying to get to work in city centres, there is often a good case for encouraging them to get out of their vehicle before they get into a built-up area. Park-and-ride facilities can work really well in that regard. They can provide secure parking and, in the future, they could also provide a charging opportunity. It would be a win-win if people could park their car, get it recharged and get on a convenient and frequent bus service that gets them right into the centre of town. That would probably involve taking advantage of a host of bus priority measures that Paul White will tell us are needed.

We need to think about whether the volume and flow of passengers is enough to sustain services. That is where partnership between local authorities and bus companies comes in. If it were the case—I can only postulate with an “if”—that people were not working 9 to 5, five days a week, in the office, the chances of it being an entirely commercial proposition to run those services would get lower, because there would not be sufficient patronage every day of the week. I have heard a great deal of anecdotal evidence that people are choosing to work in the office on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and not on Mondays and Fridays, but we would still need services to run in order for people to feel confident about doing that.

Car clubs are probably more for the central belt and more built-up areas, because of the need for convenience. Nobody wants to have to walk a long distance from their house in order to get to a shared vehicle if they are used to having a vehicle of their own at their beck and call—one that they do not have to book or clean when they have finished using it. What with children, dogs and goodness knows what, the cars in our household are full of mud and sweetie wrappers by the time the journey is finished, and people certainly do not want to find that in a shared car. However, there is some scope there.

My closing point relates to mobility as a service, which I know that the committee has been interested in. For quite a while, I have been in touch with George Hazel, among other people in Scotland, on that issue. The role of local authorities is central, because there has to be a ringmaster to pull together the different service

options for transport and to make it easier for people to choose between them. Currently, we tend to have a system in which the various modes are in competition with one another, so why on earth would those people tell us, “Actually, it would be cheaper for you if you did this other thing over here”? Somebody needs to do that and to provide information to us, as consumers.

Fiona Hyslop: I will direct my second question to Ewan Wallace, unless the other two witnesses want to come in—I will be guided by the convener on time. I want to discuss the current funding arrangements for active travel infrastructure. Public funds are channelled through Sustrans. Is that compatible with national and local climate ambitions? If not, what funding arrangements should be in place? My question is about co-ordination of funding for active travel and a local authority’s perspective on the role of Sustrans.

Ewan Wallace: On the positive side, in terms of how we have operated with Sustrans over a number of years across the 32 local authorities, we have seen significant amounts of funding routed via Sustrans. We established a specific group to work through details with Sustrans on a pan-authority basis because, early on, the process was too onerous, in the view of local authorities, in relation to the complexities of bidding in and then monitoring the projects and the funding streams. We found that quite difficult to do. In relation to the level of bidding, how we are monitored, and the support that is given by the Sustrans core teams to local authorities as the funding comes through, we are in a much better place with our colleagues from Sustrans.

Undoubtedly, the preference at local authority level would be for the allocations to be routed into local authorities; we have been consistent in seeking that, as has COSLA. Of course, we have seen that happen as well; the number of locations where local authorities can access funding in order to develop active travel projects has increased substantially over the past five to seven years or so, so the overall pot is very much bigger, as well.

That brings its own challenges, because it means that one project could be funded from three or four different sources. That then places a burden on the project or programme manager from within that individual local authority. That develops their skill set but we try to get away from that as much as possible. The preference would be for more to go directly into the local authority side of things. However, there is a healthy professional relationship right across the piece because we know that the overall amount of money has gone up.

It would be fair to say that delivery has been really difficult over the past two years. That has meant that, in some cases, at the end of the

financial year, there has not been the expected level of spend. However, I hope that everybody realises the position that a lot of local authorities have been in over the past couple of years, having to reallocate people into other activity. We are all looking forward to getting back into a better place in terms of how we take that forward.

Our preference would undoubtedly be that more came directly to us. However, we are currently in a healthy place in terms of working positively with Sustrans, Living Streets and Cycling Scotland—all the parties that are involved in making our streets more attractive for walking and cycling.

If there is a better way of doing it in terms of getting better value for money, so that we are not bidding as often and we get longevity of funding, with two or three years' worth of allocations at one time, that would be fantastic.

More recently, a big positive is that there is now a direct allocation to local government for the maintenance of new and existing active travel infrastructure. That is really welcome. That allocation is going through the Scottish Government and local government joint distribution group and it is starting to feed through. That helps with what was often one of the big issues—we would put in something nice and shiny and new but then, two years down the line, we would run into a problem in terms of being able to maintain it and look after it.

I am conscious of the time, so I will stop there.

Fiona Hyslop: Thank you. I certainly recognise that situation from a constituency case point of view, so that is a point well made.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Good morning. Thank you for coming along today.

My first question relates to something that you have all touched on already, but it would be grand if we could dig a bit deeper. What role do you think local authorities should play in delivering the electric vehicle charging infrastructure, not only for members of the public but for commercial and public transport? In Aberdeen, it seems as though we are going down the hydrogen route for buses. I would like to hear what you think the role of a local authority should be in delivering that infrastructure.

Steve Gooding: I am happy to engage on that question. There is definitely a role for local authorities. As I said earlier, with regard to bringing local knowledge to bear on the appropriate locations of different type of charger—whether they are for open public use or for commercial use—it is for the Scottish Government to decide the extent to which it wishes to run national programmes directly, the extent to which it wishes to use local authorities as delivery agents for those programmes, or the extent to which it

wishes to provide some funding, but to delegate to the local authorities exactly how that money is spent.

Each of those options has its merits, but there are issues—which we touched on before—about consistency, the rules that apply, and how easy it is to gain access to chargers. The biggest conundrum that the UK faces nationally is the extent to which the provision of chargers, both in the near term and ultimately, will be a commercial service, just as the provision of petrol and diesel is. If Government wishes to pump-prime that market, encourage people to go electric and build their confidence that the charging infrastructure will be there, it necessarily means investing in advance of need. Understandably, the private sector is a bit wary of investing in advance of need if it does not think that it will get a return in the relatively near future. That is where the public sector, not just local authorities, has an important role to play. I suspect that a model that involves the Scottish Government providing money and funding provision through local authorities is the right approach, because I suspect that we need the combination of funding certainty over a number of years and local knowledge that picks up where people are, what trips vehicles are making and the trips that Government wishes to enable those vehicles to make, which takes us back to the question about park and ride.

Jackie Dunbar: Thank you. There were some points in your answer that I had not even thought of.

Paul White: I think that local authorities definitely have a role in delivering the infrastructure. One of the differences between buses and trains that is often cited is that we do not own or have any role in the operating track that we use. Although a number of operators have depots that have charging infrastructure in place, which it is their responsibility to operate and install, there will be a number that require access to energy outwith the depot, such as at the end of a route or for a coach that is coming in from another place. They cannot always return to the depot. In such instances, it is important that the operators and the local authorities work together to understand where we might need access to charging infrastructure for the network of bus services that is desired by both the local authority and by the operator. The local authority will be able to feed in information about what is logistically possible.

I was taken with Steve's phrase "investing in advance of need". That is important because we need to have in place the ability to recharge a vehicle before we look to the operator to make any changes to its fleet by replacing fossil-fuel vehicles with hydrogen or electric vehicles. An operator

needs to be able to run those vehicles in the manner in which it runs its current fleet, and it needs access to those charging opportunities.

To answer your question, in short, yes, local authorities have a key role in the work to develop where we need charging infrastructure positions and what is possible in that regard.

10:30

Ewan Wallace: You will be glad to know that I am not going to disagree with my two colleagues on the role of local authorities in that regard.

We absolutely would have a role in planning and development, and in looking at where the best locations are, given the different functions that all local authorities have. A number of authorities are looking at requirements for their own fleets, which has a potential knock-on effect. Placing EV charge points at various locations means that they could be utilised by vans, for instance, as well as by local authority vehicles. That is one part of what colleagues in Dundee have done very successfully, and authorities can then also develop the publicly accessible elements. We are looking carefully at that, and the Energy Saving Trust has worked with a number of authorities across Scotland to identify the gaps and look at what could be put in.

We are starting at that point. Another key point, which has been touched on a couple of times, concerns sites under local authority control—car parks are an obvious example—and the role that they play.

However, I reiterate our nervousness about the role of the road itself with regard to infrastructure and the longer-term impact that that could have. We have significant concerns about that. The roll-out of the R100 programme is—quite rightly—putting in place superfast broadband across Scotland, and it involves using the road network. If we were to say that, on top of that, we want to overlay a significant amount of infrastructure to put in charging points at virtually every on-street car park space, I think that we, as a society, would not be supportive of that position. We would need a more planned, and possibly more regulated, approach to ensure that there is not a significant impact at street level.

Steve Gooding made a good point earlier about the role of private businesses with regard to charging opportunities at the workplace, for those who are still going there. Across Scotland, supermarkets are already putting in place rapid-charge locations because they see the commercial opportunity that that can bring by taking people to that location. The local authority then has to say, “Should we support local business in the same way by ensuring that we have similar types of

facilities in town centres?” It is about identifying the gaps and looking at the issues.

I have a couple of other quick points. Local authorities are already working with bus companies on where those companies may need recharge facilities in locations where it may be more difficult for them to deliver such facilities. That may be at the end of inter-urban routes in particular, where journey times are such that buses need to be able to recharge.

My final point relates to the emerging hydrogen economy, which has been mentioned. It is prevalent in the north-east, but we are seeing good examples in Fife as well, and among colleagues in Highland. Supporting the infrastructure to allow the use of hydrogen as an energy source is important for larger vehicles. In that regard, we are slightly behind where we are with electric vehicles, but I think that that aspect will also start to develop over the coming period.

Local authorities will be key to it all, and I reassure members of the committee that we will try to ensure that we share as much knowledge as possible across society. The issue is very much front and centre in the activity in which we are currently involved.

Jackie Dunbar: Thank you. As I am still a serving councillor on Aberdeen City Council—for another two days—I know about the good work that has gone in across that local authority, but it has been good to get an overall view.

Steve Gooding and Ewan Wallace are probably best placed to answer my next question, regarding the on-street electric vehicle charging infrastructure. How do you think that it can be delivered without create obstacles for folk with mobility issues or sight loss, for example? There is an extremely large, wide pavement outside my house. There is no way, right now, that I could get an electric charging point outside my place. I do not have a street column beside my house either. How do you guys see that being delivered?

Steve Gooding: That is a challenge. As with so many of the things that we have been talking about this morning, let us not pretend otherwise; it is difficult. The last thing that any of us wants to see are electric cables trailing across the footway. We already have enough problems in maintaining our footways for people; whether they have sight or mobility issues or whether—like me—they are simply not terribly fit, so let’s not go there.

In your case, if you do not have off-street parking that is really convenient, it sounds like the chances are that, due to the wide footway, you will not be able to plug in from your house. The chances are that, if you go electric, you will be reliant on the public charging network or perhaps a workplace parking option.

That is where the local authority role comes in, with regard to thinking about the nature of the streets where people live, the numbers of people there, the numbers of cars that those people might have and how often they might need to charge. It is not only about what people might find more convenient; it is also about whether they would be happier if, say, some or several of the lamp posts down their street were converted to provide overnight charging, which would mean that the cable would not go across the footway but would instead go from the lamp post over to the vehicle. However, another important local point that we also need to recognise is that not all lamp post stands are right at the edge of the footway.

It is also about whether it would be more convenient to have a more rapid charge, and recognising that as key to the future world of electric vehicles. We have a mindset in which they are a bit like petrol cars and that we will go and fill them up once a week or once a fortnight. However, the chances are that we will not. Most of the trips that most of us make are really quite short, at fewer than 10 miles. With one of the modern, latest-generation electric cars with a 200-mile range, there could be a fortnight or longer between the points at which the citizen needs to recharge the vehicle. And they might find that it is most convenient to do that while they are doing something else.

I come back to the point that we need to think about where people spend their time. That 20 to 30 minutes may not be people going to a new-look, rapid charging hub where they sit and read a book and buy a cup of coffee while their car is being recharged. Although that might be perfect for some of us, for other people, it might be while they are at the supermarket or the gym. They could spend 30 minutes at the gym and come out and find their car fit to go for another two or three weeks.

That is the sort of creative thinking that we will need, and which is starting to come through now. It is not surprising that it has taken a bit of time to come through. I put that together with the creative thinking that we should have been doing right from the outset around making sure that it is an inclusive policy and does not result in people being disadvantaged.

Lastly, the chargers need to be convenient and designed in a way that recognises that not everyone driving a vehicle has the ability to throw open the door, leap out and walk on two fit legs to go and connect the charger. In fact, I know many people who would find simply manipulating the hefty charging cable quite a task. It is a design issue for the industry to come up with chargers that are intuitive and easy to use for us all. I suspect that Paul White could talk about that in

relation to the way that we have gone about the design of buses over the years. Many things have been done to make them more accessible for people who cannot step up into the vehicle and who need hand rails that are easy to see and grip on to. We need that mindset to come through in the design of our chargers as well.

Ewan Wallace: I will add a couple of things. When, as a society, we have been looking at that particular issue, the prospect of cables across the footway has undoubtedly been one that the authority simply would not entertain. However, we have seen design proposals that involve putting pop-up charge units at the kerb line, which, again, would involve running a duct back across the footway towards a property. I pose the question again: as Steve Gooding said, is there really a need to provide a charge point such as that at every location where a vehicle would be parked?

There are certainly a couple of London boroughs—I am trying to remember which—that are trialling some of that technology and, interestingly, they are very clear that, if another car is already parked in the charge point location, that is tough, in short. It is a public road, so there is no guarantee that someone gets access to the charge point. I very much support what Steve Gooding said about looking at locations before going down the route of putting in lots of charge points on footways.

We could undoubtedly develop something to address the issue that you raise about people with mobility or sight issues. In Scotland, our street lighting network is different from that of England in how electricity is metered, so we do not have the same opportunity to tap into the street lighting network. In addition, for very good reasons to do with ensuring that footways are as clear as possible, when lots of authorities have renewed their street lighting stock, they have tended to put the street lighting column at the back of the footway rather than at the kerbside. That has been done for the correct policy position of making footways clearer for people to walk on.

Range anxiety was mentioned, which is about people knowing that they have 300 miles in their tank, whether their vehicle is run on petrol, diesel, electricity or hydrogen. That anxiety will lead to grazing—I think that that is the terminology—which is people topping up every so often to add a range of 20 or 30 miles. Colleagues at Dundee City Council have already seen that, and I think that, increasingly, that is what will tend to happen. The vehicles themselves know where the charge points are and, through the technology, they can make the driver aware of them. If there is an issue, such as that the vehicle is down to its final 20 miles, it will be able to identify charge point

locations. Some of them might be private but it will identify public ones, as well.

Across large parts of Scotland and the UK, we have never had equity in the supply of fuel and diesel. There are different price regimes according to suppliers. I am not sure about seeking to have a fully equitable position on the charge per unit of electricity through different suppliers. A driver might pay less at a supermarket than at a charge point that is run by one of the large energy suppliers, for example. As local authorities, if we provide electricity in a public location such as a car park, we will have to consider what is the acceptable rate to cover our costs. My experience is that a lot of local authorities that are already doing that are sharing their knowledge to ensure that the supply is not directly subsidised and that they cover their costs. However, an authority could decide that it wants to subsidise that, perhaps if it is a rural area and it feels that there is no other supplier or anybody who is willing to provide electricity to those who require it for their vehicles. That is a policy decision that a rural authority might take, in the same way that it might subsidise the provision of public transport.

Jackie Dunbar: I have one more question. Are there any powers or freedoms to act that local authorities should have to assist in delivering a net zero transport system? That is a quick, if-I-ruled-the-world question. Ewan Wallace, I will ask you, because you kind of brightened up when I asked the question.

Ewan Wallace: I do not know that I brightened up; I recall being asked in an evidence session with another committee what additional powers we would potentially require.

Part of the issue for us is that, as local authorities, we have lots of powers, but as much as anything, what we need is a little more certainty around some of the funding streams. That is often the biggest challenge for us. For example, the integrated travel hub was raised earlier. Those things can take some time to develop and we do not always have certainty around the funding stream. That is why the bus partnership fund is good—it is for a longer period. However, ultimately that was established by the Government.

10:45

We have most of the powers that we currently require; the issue is how we apply them in a more collaborative way. I will pause there and refer back to the earlier point about the fact that once infrastructure starts to go into the public space, we might need some regulation that might benefit not so much the roll-out towards net zero but us as public bodies in ensuring that there are no unintended consequences.

The Convener: We still have three members who have questions for the witnesses.

Mark Ruskell: I want to move on to the topic of demand management. We could spend hours on this, but I would like some succinct responses to the question. We have the Scottish Government's 20 per cent reduction target, and the net zero targets, too. Where do you see different demand management tools sitting at local authority level and how should they be deployed? Let us start with Paul White.

Paul White: In answer to the previous question, I agree with Ewan Wallace's point about budget. I wrote down two things: budget and political will. Your question falls under the second category because it is a matter of political will. Demand management is an important tool.

I gave evidence before on the 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres and I mentioned that there would have to be sticks to go along with the carrots. Essentially, you would need to manage demand and consider things such as having a workplace parking levy and have a debate around congestion charging. Local authorities should have those tools in their kit for when they are required. They will not be required in all local authorities, but they should be options that can be considered. It is about whether there is the political will to have those difficult conversations.

We saw some great progress in small demand management interventions such as spaces for people, where people had to look at space reallocation and devote more to bus or active travel. Although there have been some negative headlines, overall those interventions were hugely beneficial. If we are serious about net zero, the need to introduce such measures probably outweighs the—hopefully short-term—negative reactions that such demand management measures can bring.

Ewan Wallace: On the powers that we already have, in the larger cities, there are low emission zones coming in, which will impact on choice and decision making. That is what demand management is all about—making clear the impact of the choice of the type of mode that you utilise.

As authorities, we already have the ability to vary our parking charges. We now have the opportunity to use workplace parking levies, which is another tool. I support Paul White's comment that the 20 per cent reduction target will focus the minds of local authorities about how we will achieve it and the range of things that we will have to do.

I suppose that one of the biggest tools in our demand management box is about how we deal with the network in terms of streets. We have seen lots of examples of the potential to reduce the

impact on schools. Edinburgh has done some really good work on that. We are now back into having discussions about the role of 20mph zones as a tool for influencing people's choice about where, when and how they travel. That is what we see demand management as.

There is a big task for us in pulling all those things together, and it is absolutely a joint thing between the Scottish Government, the local authorities, regional transport partnerships, and key transport bodies. How do we make sure that all those different elements are working together? One of my asks would be for us to start to develop that in as collaborative a way as possible.

Mark Ruskell: Can that 20 per cent reduction target be met without some of these demand management measures or is some form of demand management going to be essential?

Ewan Wallace: SCOTS and COSLA work closely with Transport Scotland on that. There are definitely places where it can be achieved, and with softer measures than some of the potentially less popular ones. The bigger challenges will be in those areas where there are fewer alternatives to use in making that switch. It might well be that the carrots will be more effective, which takes us back to Paul White's area of activity. The bus industry has a role in getting people to change their travel habits, so we need to utilise the bus networks.

Steve Gooding: We are talking specifically about the constraints on car use, I guess. There are two types, very broadly speaking. There are physical constraints, such as the reallocation of road space and, to some extent, the price paid for parking. Those things are definitely within the ambit of the local authority and they go right through to the workplace parking levy, for example, which will almost certainly be promoted by the local authority but with powers around it and some help from the Scottish Government.

Then there are the economic or fiscal measures, which will probably need to be viewed as national policy. On those fronts, two quite important things are sometimes missed in the transport debate when we get hostile transport experts, like me, yattering away and talking very knowledgeably. We rather miss the bigger picture that asks, why would I, as a Scottish citizen, living in a place that is going to implement these measures, think that it will be better for me?

That sounds rather selfish, but if we do not paint a picture of why a traffic-calmed area—one with a 20mph speed limit, or one where street space has been reallocated to provide more space for cycling, walking and public transport—makes things better, it should not surprise us that when measures are implemented, we get the sort of backlash that Paul White mentioned. Although

there is a case for saying, "This was a tough political decision, but we have taken it and we are just going to bash ahead and people will get used to it", would it not be better if the argument was turned on its head and people were carried with us rather more than we have seen?

On the implementation of measures that I am familiar with in England and around greater London, I have seen that the more the local community feels that it is involved in deciding what the place that people live in will be like, and why they would like it to be different from the way that it is now, the smoother things go. On the other hand, many such measures were implemented quickly during Covid lockdowns, and there was a sudden backlash and people were saying, "Hang on a sec. I don't like this and I don't remember anyone asking my opinion."

Even if the measures are better for people, I draw the comparison with active travel. It is undoubtedly better for all of us, but we do not necessarily all feel like doing it. We need to present reasons why things are better for the future.

Secondly, if we are going to use financial measures, we have to recognise that, although, by and large, people who use cars are wealthier than some other households, nevertheless, low-income households will be the first to be impacted. Those are often households in which people have low-income jobs and work what we used to think of as antisocial hours. They also do jobs that cannot be done from home. For example, office cleaners cannot work from home—that just does not work.

Therefore, we need to think again more broadly. If we are going to try to influence such people not to use their car or perhaps to car share or something like that, we need to consider what complementary measures we can take that will help them over the hump financially in order to make the change. That might not necessarily be a complementary transport measure; it might be something in the social security system or some grant-giving system that enables people to make a change to their lifestyle.

Mark Ruskell: I thank all the panellists for those useful answers.

I will move on. How could and should councils be using the powers to support bus use in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, which was passed in the previous session of Parliament? What is the next tranche of activity that councils should be engaged in?

I ask Paul White to answer first, after which I will go to Ewan Wallace.

Paul White: I do not know whether you are referring to the powers on bus regulation or the

powers on low-emission zones, both of which are in the 2019 act. We have seen progress on low-emission zones in the four major cities, where zones are due to be enforced in 2024. I will therefore concentrate on the other measures.

As I mentioned, in the short term, we have the £500 million bus partnership fund, which can be delivered where local authorities work with bus operators through bus service improvement partnerships to consider the means by which to improve services for bus passengers. Part of that is about reducing congestion. That goes back to Steve Gooding's point about how to market the benefits of demand management. As the national transport strategy points out, there is a virtuous circle with bus demand. If you introduce measures to reduce congestion, you make it cheaper to operate services and therefore you can introduce improvements in the frequency of service and running speeds, as well as fare reductions. You get a positive loop as people see those changes and more people travel by bus, and so on ad infinitum.

In the short term, that is the best and quickest means by which to deliver for bus passengers. The 2019 act allows authorities to consider whether to have a franchising scheme or municipal operation—both options are on the table. Recent research done by Systra for Strathclyde Partnership for Transport suggests that, although we should consider those options, there are costs for both and there are timescales involved. We need to be careful that we do not jeopardise activity in the short term, in which we can deliver real improvements through the partnership model. We should not hold back to have longer-term conversations. We can have those conversations, but I stress the need to ensure that we spend the £500 million well and quickly through the bus partnership fund and the partnership model.

Mark Ruskell: Ewan, do you have any brief points to add?

Ewan Wallace: The seven regional transport partnerships, which are part of SCOTS, tend to be the ones that lead for us on bus provision. The best way to sum up the situation is that we are currently considering all the options and looking at the costs and benefits of the powers that have been made available in the 2019 act.

The costs that would be involved in franchising or the municipal route are not insignificant. We have a long-established model for buses in Scotland and the United Kingdom. The partnership model has worked well in many locations, but there are definitely still gaps in parts of Scotland—I think that everybody would acknowledge that. That situation has emerged in the past three, four or five years. Colleagues in the Association of

Transport Co-ordinating Officers are all over this one, and the RTPs are looking carefully at our options. It is part of the issue about demand management, changing behaviours and giving greater choice of mode.

Mark Ruskell: Thank you. Back to you, convener.

The Convener: Liam Kerr is next, after which Natalie Don will ask the final questions.

11:00

Liam Kerr: I will direct my question to Steve Gooding, because it relates to an issue that he raised earlier, although I appreciate that Ewan Wallace might want to come in.

Steve, you flagged up the issue of commercial vehicles and talked about vans and taxis as enabling a town to function. If we want to regenerate the high street, generally and post-pandemic, it is logical that deliveries and commercial traffic will increase—I am thinking in particular of the use of lorries. Paul White talked about the business case for buses hinging on the cost of the vehicle reducing, and I presume that freight traffic is in exactly the same boat.

What can a local authority do to reduce freight and commercial transport emissions, while ensuring that there is not a negative impact on the high street that is equivalent to the one that some argue that the car park tax and a low-emissions zone would have?

Steve Gooding: That is quite a tricky question. I think that we should acknowledge that it is a tricky issue and that there are no easy answers.

Increasingly, different forms of vehicles can be used for last-mile deliveries. I am thinking of things such as electrically boosted tricycles and electrically powered small delivery vehicles. It is not necessarily the case that large vehicles need to be used all the time for replenishing the shelves of our city centre stores or those of the restaurants and hotels that make up our hospitality industry.

However, it needs to be recognised that, if we are to have city centre hotels, somebody has to do the laundry and make sure that the restaurant is stocked. It is key that thought is given to the times of day at which deliveries are made and to where loading bays are provided for commercial vehicles to stop.

Thought also needs to be given to whether there is any scope for working with the commercial sector. I know that the committee has taken evidence from people in the commercial sector. I am aware of initiatives down south, whereby retailers in a particular location have clubbed together to get a collective delivery of things that

they need, rather than each of them having a van parked outside at the same time of day, taking up road space and holding up the traffic.

Although the use of alternative fuels has been slower to come through into the commercial sector, principally because of the nature of battery design, that is now happening. That is harder with bigger, heavier vehicles, as it is with buses. Hydrogen might be the answer for the biggest vehicles but, in the past year, three or four of the big auto companies have brought to market vans that are electric or, at the very least, hybrid. I would say that there is scope for local authorities to have conversations with the Scottish Government about clean air zones and the restrictions that apply to vehicles that are hybrid and capable of running purely on electric power—in other words, on a zero tail-pipe emissions basis. Consideration could be given to whether those vehicles should continue to be allowed in without the clean air zone charges having to be paid.

As I mentioned earlier, when it comes to clean air zones, it is important that there is consistency. It can be quite confusing for a company that delivers to multiple locations to find that one clean air zone has one set of rules, while another has another set of rules. A bit more consistency there might be the answer. In addition, for many vehicles, it is likely that the hybrid route will be easier and—from a purchase point of view—less expensive. Therefore, if a vehicle can run purely on electric power, setting a threshold, whereby the vehicle should not run on petrol within the confines of the city centre, might be a better answer than simply saying, “If that vehicle uses fossil fuels, the owner is going to have to pay.”

Liam Kerr: Thank you.

Ewan Wallace, my next question is for you, but do you have anything to add to Steve Gooding’s answer to my first one?

Ewan Wallace: I would build on the need to have that conversation with national agencies and with freight operating companies in individual city-region areas that are impacted by the low-emission zones that are coming through the system. There is a need to talk to those operators—as regional transport partnerships and some local authorities do—and get a good feel for their plans for changing the types of vehicle that they currently operate.

Many local authorities operate very large fleets themselves and are already looking at the technology that Steve Gooding referred to. They are considering whether to use hydrogen, for example. I have seen Ford Transit-sized vehicles operating very efficiently on hydrogen and electricity. They are already being trialled, so the

available vehicle technology could move quite quickly.

There is also a need to get a feel for how freight companies in those areas operate, and a need for their local authority or regional transport partnership to assist them as best it can and for those companies to join up so that they operate as efficiently as possible.

Liam Kerr: I will stick with you for my next question. You said that you are based in the north-east. We rightly talk a great deal about getting people out of cars and on to public transport and/or into electric vehicles using the charging infrastructure that we have heard about this morning. In your view, is that realistic in the more rural areas of Aberdeenshire and similar local authority areas? If not, what are the rural solutions that local authorities need to explore? For example, might local authorities like to see investment in new rail lines and/or the dualling of key roads so that traffic is less polluting and less stop/start, and to ensure that through traffic does not go through town centres, clogging them up for buses, which Paul White is concerned about?

Ewan Wallace: Certainly—speaking with my SCOTS hat on—there are good connections across all the rural authorities and we share our experiences. Something that could allow towns in the Borders to operate is often similar to something that would get us better transport connectivity in towns in Aberdeenshire and the Highlands.

At the core of that is local authorities’ ability to work with community groups, talk to community councils and get feedback from ward councillors about what the key issues are. Getting the modal shift that you spoke of is reliant on the ability to fund bus services at the required level, for example.

I will put my day-job hat back on. The use of demand-responsive transport has been very effective in the north-east of Scotland over a long period of time. It costs a little bit more, but it allows us to serve communities with bus services. That is developing across the UK. More dynamic demand-responsive transport services are being looked at in the London area, and we have one running in Aberdeenshire and are looking carefully at how effective it is

Undoubtedly, the bus network is still not as extensive as it needs to be in rural areas. A big decision point for any rural authority is whether it will invest in revenue support for passenger transport that allows people to move about the area, whether for leisure, business, health or education.

The next element is the infrastructure that allows that to happen more efficiently. There may

well be locations outwith the central belt area of Scotland where some of the key routes will require investment. Those will be roads for the future, so they will probably be built from different materials or have better telematics to impart information. The electric vehicles and the hydrogen vehicles would utilise those roads.

We spoke earlier about the ability to use interchange hubs—your previous question related to freight. This is about joining up all those different elements. Often, integrated transport is seen as being about the interchange in the bus network, whereas the integration that we would typically try to develop as local authorities and regional transport partnerships is about all trips and all modes. It is about all those different elements.

Some areas will need more than others, because some sections of the overall network are not at the necessary standard. That will be part of a strategic approach, whether for the authority that I work for or for Highland Council, Scottish Borders Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council or Perth and Kinross Council, which are all authorities where the population is spread across large areas and the issue is connectivity as much as it is the mobility of people.

It is a difficult question to answer, in that there is not a single solution. That is why MSPs will see a range of things at the regional and local level that some people will support and others will not. However, those things are always done with that local dimension to them.

Liam Kerr: I am very grateful for that response. I have no further questions, convener.

The Convener: Great. I will bring in Natalie Don for the final questions.

Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): We have spoken this morning about the role of local authorities in the delivery of not only a net zero transport system but consistency across the board.

What role can regional transport partnerships play in the delivery of net zero? Do the witnesses feel that that role might differ based on the model of RTP, and could any problems arise from that, given different responsibilities, approaches or, perhaps, inconsistencies?

Ewan Wallace: We are fortunate that, for a long time now, SCOTS has had all seven regional transport partnerships as part of our family within the overall local government family. Generally, how we work is very positive. Those partnerships are key in terms of our ability to look across boundaries and look at the roles of different local authorities.

The partnerships will have challenges sometimes, when there are different perspectives in some of their partner authorities. That is particularly the case with colleagues at SPT, as SPT has a far larger range of powers and can deliver a much larger range of activities. It is essentially the passenger transport authority for that area, so it has to have good relationships with its local authorities. That set-up is quite different, but it means that SPT can put in place a whole range of activities and introduce a lot of things. We have already talked about many of those things this morning. The Confederation of Passenger Transport, which is represented today by Paul White, is heavily involved in working with the likes of SPT.

Other partnerships do not have quite so many direct powers, but they can give that strategic overview and the partnership board can garner views from all its partner local authorities and share them across the boundaries. They now, of course, have the powers to retain capital funding beyond a single year. That came in under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, which allows them to retain funding so that they can look at things that are genuinely longer term and cross-boundary. I think that I have made the point already that that is, in many ways, probably at the core of some of the things that we will have to do in relation to delivering on net zero.

I do not necessarily see the models as being a constraint, as such, because they were established in 2005 and those who are involved in the work of those partnerships are well used to them. Under the auspices of the national transport strategy, work is being done to look at the overall roles and responsibilities of the Scottish Government and local authorities in relation to regional transport partnerships. A group is looking at whether there are better ways of tackling some of the issues, and net zero is one of the key issues that is being considered.

11:15

Natalie Don: Thank you. Does Paul White want to add anything?

Paul White: First, I should declare an interest as a non-councillor board member of the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership. I am a board member because I see a lot of value at regional level.

Ewan Wallace hit the nail on the head when he talked about the strategic overview level. Bus services do not fit neatly within local authority boundaries; many services run over longer distances and cross over boundaries. There is an important role in looking strategically at what is happening across a region; in ensuring that the

standards that are expected are met, such as those relating to emissions levels; and in ensuring that what is being done to improve bus services for our passengers involves people working together. There needs to be a holistic approach so that, for example, one local authority does not invest a lot of money in reducing congestion in their area while, in the neighbouring authority, buses are held up for 20 minutes because of something else. We can see the real benefit of SPT's work through the model 3 partnership; it plays a good role in the Glasgow bus partnership. I am a big advocate of regional transport partnerships and the work that they do.

The Convener: We are running slightly behind schedule, but I want to ask Steve Gooding a final question. I believe that the concept of permitted development is being used in parts of England to assist the roll-out of charging points at supermarkets. Given the need to think creatively and that cars can be charged while people spend 20 or 30 minutes shopping, that seems to me to be one of the ways forward. How is permitted development being used to expedite the roll-out of charging points at supermarkets in England?

Steve Gooding: I am afraid that, in all honesty, I do not know. However, it is an important option, because making it easier for chargers to be fitted and having a conversation with major supermarket chains to establish their enthusiasm and willingness to fit them could be a key part of the future.

We have touched on the issue of skills, knowledge and understanding in relation to regional transport authorities. The Electric Vehicle Energy Taskforce in England has noted that regional bodies could be best placed to develop such expertise, rather than every local authority being expected to recruit people who understand everything about electric chargers—how they work and where they might go. There is a skills opportunity in that regard, too.

The Convener: Great. That brings us to the end of our allocated time. We have covered a lot of ground. I thank the witnesses for joining us this morning and for their valuable insight, which is much appreciated. The committee will continue its scrutiny as part of the local government inquiry in weeks to come. Enjoy the rest of your day.

Subordinate Legislation

The Traffic Signs Amendment (Scotland) Regulations and General Directions 2022 (SSI 2022/111)

11:18

The Convener: The next agenda item is consideration of the Traffic Signs Amendment (Scotland) Regulations and General Directions 2022. The instrument has been laid under the negative procedure, which means that its provisions will come into force unless the Parliament agrees to a motion to annul it. No motions to annul have been lodged.

As members have no comments on the instrument, does the committee agree that it does not wish to make any further recommendations in relation to the instrument?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I close the public part of the meeting.

11:19

Meeting continued in private until 12:39.

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

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot

