

Scottish Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Union Connectivity Review, HC 1073](#)

Monday 24 January 2022

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Members present: Pete Wishart (Chair); Mhairi Black; Deidre Brock; Wendy Chamberlain; Sally-Ann Hart; John Lamont; Douglas Ross.

Questions 1-42

Witness

[I](#): Sir Peter Hendy, Chair, Union Connectivity Review, and Chair of Network Rail.



Examination of witness

Witness: Sir Peter Hendy.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to the Scottish Affairs Committee's one-off evidence session on the Union connectivity review. We are pleased to have here the author of the report, Sir Peter Hendy. I will now ask Sir Peter to introduce himself and say anything by way of a short introductory statement.

Sir Peter Hendy: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Peter Hendy. In my day job I am chair of Network Rail, having been appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport. I was asked by the Prime Minister to review the connectivity of the United Kingdom, which I have done, and my final report was published in November.

Q2 **Chair:** We are grateful for that introduction. Could you maybe move a little closer to your microphone, Sir Peter, so that we can hear you properly? Perhaps you could tell us what exactly the review will achieve with regard to better transport links for Scotland across the United Kingdom.

Sir Peter Hendy: I was asked by the Prime Minister in the summer of 2020 to review the connectivity of the four nations comprising the United Kingdom. I think it is generally accepted that better connectivity produces economic growth, jobs, houses and social cohesion. I looked at the connections between the four nations to see what could be improved and what I should recommend. You will have seen the brief of the detailed commission that I got. My conclusions are set out in the report. Would you like me to say what the principal conclusions are in respect of Scottish connectivity?

Q3 **Chair:** I think we will come into this specifically. Obviously, there is a lot in your programme that we will look at in detail. We want to hear about what you think it contributes overall. What will the transport users of Scotland now expect? The report has been met with huge approval from the UK Government, given that they commissioned you to do it. How will it improve our lives as Scottish MPs to get back and forth to London?

Sir Peter Hendy: The first thing to say, in respect of the devolved Administrations, is that it is clear to me that devolution has been good for transport, and there is the improvement of links within Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There is no question that, especially in Scotland but also in Wales, devolving authority to the respective Administrations has produced great benefit. As you know, Network Rail is still the owner and operator of the railway infrastructure in the whole of mainland UK, so I can testify to that.

It is also clear that, because of devolution, in some cases, links between the nations have not been pursued as relentlessly as links within the nations. In my view, probably the most important of my recommendations, apart from the establishment of a UK network of strategic transport, is on the connection between Scotland and England on



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the west coast main line, bearing in mind that HS2 is being built to Birmingham—the Bill to extend it to Crewe and Manchester was placed in the House today—and the links further north between that line and Scotland have not been pursued as relentlessly as they could be.

You will see a detailed recommendation in the report about looking at what else could be done to improve journey times and capacity for both passengers and freight to Scotland. That is one example of a number of my recommendations that I believe would make a real difference to Scotland, the people in Scotland and the Scottish economy.

Chair: Fantastic. I have a couple other questions for you in a minute, but I want to bring in my colleague, John Lamont, who has to be in the Chamber for some other responsibility, so I will bring him in just now and come back to you in a tick.

Q4 **John Lamont:** Thank you, Chair, and apologies—I need to be in the Chamber shortly. It is good to see you again, Sir Peter, and congratulations on producing such an excellent report. There has been some media coverage in Scotland about the engagement you had with the Scottish Government. Certainly, the Scottish Government’s Transport Minister was very vocal in his criticism of your work. Can you set out what engagement you had with the Scottish Government and with Transport Scotland and its officials in your preparation of this report?

Sir Peter Hendy: I met Mr Matheson on two occasions—virtually, of course, because of the pandemic—on 26 November 2020 and 9 March 2021. On both occasions, Mr Matheson told me very clearly of the Scottish Government’s view about their responsibilities for devolved transport. But on both occasions, although he expressed that view, we also had a rounded discussion about the sorts of things that I would do, because I told him what I was going to do. We had some discussion about that.

I think the Scottish Government officials were not commanded to give me assistance. But when I look at the conclusions I reached in respect of transport to and from Scotland, I think that, broadly speaking, they accord very closely with the Scottish Government’s policy.

Indeed, I was very interested to read in Transport Scotland’s “Strategic Transport Projects Review 2”, which was published only a few days ago, that it actually accords very closely with my conclusions and it includes a conclusion about improving the A75 between Cairnryan and the M6 through southern Scotland.

I did have some engagement, and we did have a robust discussion about the relative responsibilities of the Scottish Government, but I believe I have made some useful conclusions and that actually they accord with the Scottish Government’s viewpoint.

Q5 **John Lamont:** Thank you. I very much agree with your opening remarks about the devolution settlement effectively neglecting transport links between different parts of the UK. While it may work within each of the devolved nations, there is a real gap, certainly from the perspective of



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my constituents living in the Scottish Borders, as to who is responsible for those cross-border links, which your report has identified so well, particularly the Borders railway extension and the A1 and A68, which are major routes across the border.

I am grateful for the meeting you had with me and representatives of the Newcastleton community a few months ago in the campaign for Borders rail. You will recall the strong campaign in my constituency for the reinstatement of the Borders railway from Tweedbank down to Hawick, Newcastleton and on to Carlisle. It was not particularly identified in your report as being a project in need of acceleration, although you did note the strong support in the community for it. Can you expand a bit more on why you did not earmark the Borders railway more fulsomely for further support?

Sir Peter Hendy: Yes, indeed. It was a pleasure to meet you and some of your constituents to discuss that subject. I noted that the UK Government have already put some money into the development of a business case for the Borders railway between Tweedbank and Carlisle. At the moment, that seems to be a sufficient step forward. But the other conclusion that I was just referring to—about the west coast main line—is that, as and when the Borders railway gets to Carlisle, it needs better connections to the south from Carlisle. My conclusions about better connectivity of HS2 with Scotland include better connectivity with Carlisle and the Borders railway, if and when it is built.

Q6 **John Lamont:** Lastly from me, what is your view of the response you have had from the UK Government and the Scottish Government on your report?

Sir Peter Hendy: My understanding is that the UK Government welcomes the publication of my report when it is out. I understand that it is minded to take forward the general conclusion about establishing a UK strategic transport network, which obviously I am very pleased about. There are detailed discussions going on—I am party to some of them—about the Government's response to individual conclusions. I have attended two roundtables called by Baroness Vere: last week with people from Wales, especially north Wales; and this morning with a range of business and local authority consultees from Scotland, who seemed to welcome the report.

The Government have indicated that they are likely to put forward a further tranche of money towards looking at the detail of what I have recommended. In many cases, I have recommended studies to produce what the best infrastructure solution should be. I did not have time to do that in the report itself, but that is the right thing to do to establish what the best business and wider economic cases are for infrastructure improvement, so I welcome the fact that it looks like money for those will be made available.

In respect of the Scottish Government, I already referred, in answer to your earlier question, to the "Strategic Transport Projects Review 2". I have reviewed that document, which was published only in the last few



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days, and it appears to me to accord very closely with the recommendations that I have made in respect of principal links between Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, so I am obviously very pleased about that.

John Lamont: Thank you very much.

Q7 **Chair:** Can I just come back to the issue of engagement with the Scottish Government? I think Mr Lamont is quite right to say that a lot of the discussion and conversation about your inquiry and report has been about some of the engagement that has gone on. Surely you understand the concerns and anxieties of the Scottish Government about your report, given that transport is exclusively devolved and is the responsibility of Scottish parliamentarians, the Scottish Government and its agencies. You have come in and made a few recommendations about what should be happening in an area that is really the preserve of Scottish parliamentarians.

Sir Peter Hendy: Well, I certainly understand it. I had a very straight discussion with Mr Matheson, and I think he would say the same. I was asked to look at the connectivity between the four nations of the United Kingdom. You have already heard me observe that I think that some of the connections have been neglected because of the devolution of transport.

The other thing that is obviously true, in relation to transport networks, is that improvements in one country can make a difference in another. If you look at my proposition for the improvement of the west coast main line to better connect HS2 to Scotland, much of the improvement needs to be made in England in order to better connect Scotland with the other nations of the United Kingdom. That is just geography. The west coast main line north of Crewe is tortuously curved and has some steep gradients, so investing some money in those will make a substantial decrease in the journey time between Scotland and England. I think those improvements are very worth while for Scotland, but they therefore need to be made in England. That seems to justify a proposition for looking, on a whole-network basis, at better transport.

I am reassured that, in the last resort, what I concluded is very closely correlated with the "Strategic Transport Projects Review 2", just published by the Scottish Government. It would be a different matter if somehow I had concluded something very different. Incidentally I did, in my report and just now, give credit to the fact that transport devolution in Scotland has produced some very good outcomes within Scotland itself.

Q8 **Chair:** I heard that. I think you have said three times that what you concluded matches the strategic review from the Scottish Government; I am presuming that is about the A75, A77, the other trunk routes and some of the rail routes. If that is the case, I am struggling to see why we needed you to come along and tell us that. Would it not be better just to give whatever resource is available to the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament to get on with it, given that it is their responsibility



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and it is for them to work with the other Governments across the UK on areas of mutual interest?

Sir Peter Hendy: What I would say to you is this. The most widespread comment from Northern Ireland about its connectivity with the rest of the United Kingdom was about the inadequacy of the road link on the A75, so the conclusion that that could be improved for the benefit of the United Kingdom is, I think, quite a proper conclusion to reach. You will also see in my recommendations that not only did I recommend that it should be improved, but I recommended that, since it was a strategic transport link for the whole United Kingdom, the UK Government should contribute towards its improvement. I think that is a very reasonable conclusion. If you think that there are certain routes in the United Kingdom that have a special importance for the economy of the whole United Kingdom, it seems to me quite incumbent on me, in a review such as this, to say—which I did—that the UK Government should contribute to it. And my understanding is that officials are now discussing how that contribution might be made.

Q9 **Chair:** Did anybody discuss that with you? I am interested, and you have brought it up. I think the view from the Scottish Government is that this should be extra spending and not impact on existing budgets where priorities have been determined by directly elected Scottish politicians. Is it your view that it should all be extra money for any of the contributions from the Scottish Government to your review?

Sir Peter Hendy: What I did conclude was that it is not for me to tell the UK Government what money it should spend or how it should spend it, but I can certainly recommend doing that. It seemed to me that the proposition to have a UK strategic network, and for some roads, railway routes and other routes within the United Kingdom to be identified as that, necessarily means that there must be some degree of extra funding made available; otherwise, there will just be a redistribution of existing funding. That is why I particularly made a recommendation in respect of the A75 that it should be the UK Government putting some extra money into it.

Q10 **Chair:** I am sure that will be noted very keenly by Scottish Government Ministers.

A few people have said—obviously, it is not for the Committee to say—that some of your proposals may be on the modest side. When we look at some of the improvements, necessary though they are, they are not quite up to HS2 or even the bridge to Northern Ireland that was being presented and promoted at one point. You are among friends now, so what was your honest view about the idea of a bridge between Scotland and Northern Ireland?

Sir Peter Hendy: Let's deal first with the general question about modest recommendations. Many of the things that I have looked at have been insufficiently well developed to be clear about how much money you might reasonably spend. I am not a maximalist, in terms of miles and miles of new infrastructure. I think an economic case for a complete high-speed railway between Crewe and Scotland—the central belt of Scotland at



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least—is pretty unlikely. What I am in favour of is filleting out the best proposals.

A rail journey time to Scotland from London of three hours and a bit would require some detailed engagement with what needs to be done on the west coast main line. I wasn't in a position to do it myself and therefore it is quite clear to me that what one should do is to review it in detail, spend a modest amount of money in developing proposals, and make sure that the business case and the wider economic case that results is the most acceptable one to Government.

You will see in the cases of other proposals that I suggested a multi-modal review—for instance, the A1 north of Newcastle, both in England and Scotland, and the east coast main line. There clearly are things that could be done and may need to be done with both of those. I was not in a position to do the detailed work myself, so I suggested that somebody look at it in great detail and that the two Governments look at it together and find out what the best thing to do is to spend the least possible money and get the best possible conclusion.

In respect of the fixed link with Northern Ireland, I was asked to look especially at that. It has been a subject on the table for at least the last 130 years. I commissioned two eminent engineers to look at what could be done and to find out how much it would cost. I have been at Network Rail for six and a half years, and I have seen a number of very large infrastructure projects that have taken far longer to deliver than first estimated and are far more costly than they looked when they started.

I know about the origin of one or two cases: they were originated in a very short space of time by political command. In respect of the fixed link between Northern Ireland and Scotland, it is obviously a huge job. Nobody knew how big. Nobody had ever done that work before. Doug Oakervee and Gordon Masterton—

Q11 **Chair:** Surely it was a crazy idea that was never going to happen. Wasn't a lot of time wasted on what could have been a more constructive report if nobody had come forward with this proposal, which looks like quite a ridiculous suggestion?

Sir Peter Hendy: Well, I was asked to look at it. I didn't express a view about it when I started.

Q12 **Chair:** Tell us what you really think about it. Go on!

Sir Peter Hendy: I have written what I really think about it. It is possible to do it. It is not in excess of modern technology; it is probably near the edge of modern technology. You will notice that I said that it ought to be reviewed in the future.

One of the issues surrounding it, if you look at either a bridge or a tunnel, is that the approach gradients are limited by the technology that we have now in respect of railway gradients and the ability of drivers to traverse



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long-distance roads. That may change with autonomous vehicles, and it ought to be reviewed at some stage.

I think the proposition that such a link might be built is not improbable. There are tunnels of that sort of length in the rest of the world—for instance, the tunnel under the channel. People will recall that that was derided before it was successfully completed 30 years ago. I think it was a reasonable question to ask. My conclusion is factual: it is possible to do it, but the sums of money involved and the time that it will take are not credible at the moment. If it were revisited with the advent of future technology, the situation might change. There is no doubt, if you listen to businesses in Ireland and Northern Ireland—which I did—that people would long for a better and quicker traverse from Northern Ireland to the rest of the United Kingdom than currently there is.

Q13 Chair: Had you proposed it, it could have been the Hendy bridge, or Beaufort's Dyke or whatever it was.

Lastly, almost a million pounds, I think, has been spent in looking at this as an option, hasn't it? Surely that has just been a waste of money?

Sir Peter Hendy: It is a complex subject. Actually, I was determined to do it properly, and I did. In terms of establishing the right proposition for a major infrastructure project, it is a fraction of the total cost, which you will acknowledge.

I can tell you from my recent experience at Network Rail that I wish that such comprehensive work had been done on some of the other things that we have been asked to do, because the costs would be more accurate—as would the timescale—and it would save your parliamentary colleagues on the Public Accounts Committee a considerable amount of time in investigating what went wrong afterwards.

Chair: Thank you for that. I will hand over to my colleague Deidre Brock.

Q14 Deidre Brock: Good afternoon, Sir Peter. Thank you for appearing in front of the Committee. I wanted to ask about Westminster's track record of delivering on major transport projects. You were just saying that you wished some more comprehensive work had been done beforehand for projects such as, I suppose, Crossrail, the great west electrification project and HS2. That track record isn't exactly great. Crossrail's estimated budget was originally £14.8 billion, I think; it's currently standing at £18.7 billion. HS2 was originally estimated at coming in at £55 billion and is currently somewhere between £72 billion and £98 billion; although, of course, that was before the Leeds leg was abruptly cancelled.

Isn't it understandable that devolved authorities are perhaps a little wary of allowing the UK Government—and the Transport Department in particular—to take the lead on cross-border projects, or even letting them anywhere near devolved areas of transport? As you said, devolution has been good for transport. Isn't a reluctance to accept that sort of imposition from Westminster understandable?



Sir Peter Hendy: Let us look first at the cost of major projects. The Great Western electrification was largely done on my watch at Network Rail. I think it was poorly estimated. The organisation didn't have experience in doing the work in the way it was asked to. It provided the original estimate—not the UK Government, but Network Rail in some previous iteration—which has overrun. I don't blame the UK Government for that, although I think you could look at the speed at which the estimate was asked for.

The estimates for Crossrail were, of course, originally done by Transport for London. I was the commissioner there for nearly 10 years, so I think the preparatory works for Crossrail were done properly. However, I don't think its execution was very good; there is always a danger in execution. As for HS2, I don't know enough about that to be able to give you a view.

Of course, such difficulties with major capital projects are not just the preserve of England or the UK Government. My recollection, from afar, is that the cost of the Scottish Parliament building turned out to be rather different from the estimation. Big projects do have that problem. My colleague, Andrew Haines—the chief executive of Network Rail—is working as hard as he can to make sure that our project delivery function is fit for purpose, and that that sort of thing doesn't happen as often in the future as it might have in the past.

The devolved Administrations have a good track record. We admire the delivery of electrification in Scotland, which is principally attributed to the fact that the Government have a programme, so the Network Rail and contractors move from one project to another, and the cost of it is going down. We are learning from that in England.

However, I'm not sure you can say, "Well, it's the UK Government's estimates that are all wrong, and therefore they should have no part." As I have said before, if you want better rail journey times and better capacity for both passengers and freight between England and Scotland, much of the improvement has to be delivered in England. That's not a choice; that is a geographical fact. Getting those things right is as important everywhere as it is in any one of the devolved Administrations.

Q15 **Deidre Brock:** Thank you. The point about the Scottish Parliament is interesting. A number of us wonder at that initial £40 million estimate. A friend of mine who is an architect was designing a shed for a supermarket at that time, and the estimate for that was about £40 million. So, yes—there are always questions to be asked about that.

Moving on to an area where there really is quite a large discrepancy: we have already discussed the bridge between Northern Ireland and Scotland that the Prime Minister was so enthusiastic about. The original estimates—proclaimed quite loudly by senior politicians—were for £15 billion to £20 billion. Your figures estimate that the cost would be something like £335 billion for building the bridge or £209 billion for a tunnel. How do you explain that enormous discrepancy? How did the £15 billion to £20 billion figures come about if, as you say, no one had done



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that work before now?

Sir Peter Hendy: It is very interesting. Personally, I had never proffered any number whatsoever before the work was done towards the end of my report.

Deidre Brock: That is very sensible.

Sir Peter Hendy: Interestingly, I was never asked by anybody for a number until my report was finished. I read all the press speculation with great interest. Nobody had ever rung me up—formally or informally—to ask, “How much do you think it would cost?”, and, if they had, I couldn’t have told them.

The object of doing the work was to find that out, and Gordon Masterton and Doug Oakervee have done an excellent piece of work on that. One of the difficulties with major projects is that many people, not just politicians, talk loosely about how much they believe they might cost without knowing enough detail to be certain. What you will have discovered, if you have read the supplementary report about the fixed link, is that it would be a very complex piece of work if it were done, either as a bridge or a tunnel. It has taken quite a lot of time to come up with a robust estimate, so I do not hold myself responsible for those numbers. I took great care never to quote any number until I knew what it was. When I knew what it was, I put it in the report.

Q16 **Deidre Brock:** That sounds very sensible. I am just wondering why civil servants from the Department for Transport perhaps were not reining in the figures that were being bandied about in the press, or at least saying on the record, “We have no idea what the costs might be at this stage.” That is an enormous difference in price, isn’t it?

Sir Peter Hendy: I don’t think that I have ever seen—I might be wrong, but I have read every piece of media and comment on the subject that I could since I started—a Minister in the Department for Transport quote any number for it. Had any of them asked me, I would have said, “Don’t quote a number; I haven’t done the work yet.” I do not know where that has come from.

As a politician, you will know better than I do that people can endlessly speculate about things, but I was completely fascinated, as indeed were Doug Oakervee and Gordon Masterton, that nobody ever asked any of us to comment on any of that until the report was done. We could not have said anything if they had, but they never did.

Q17 **Deidre Brock:** There wasn’t even any sort of private discussion going on. All right. Thank you for that.

I notice that your review sets out that “7 in 10 people in Scotland who travelled to other nations of the UK once a month or more in 2019 were more favourable towards the Union than those who did so less regularly (5 in 10)”, and I think it mentions eight in 10 people. This is from a social research report that is in your review, from Ipsos MORI.



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It has been suggested that the thinking behind asking those questions was trying to show that this could potentially lessen support for an independent Scotland. Is that part of what the UK net is all about? Was this part of any discussions that you had had with senior politicians, like the Prime Minister or the Chancellor, because I know you have spoken with them?

Sir Peter Hendy: Absolutely none at all. I was commissioned to do this report, and in the course of it I thought that it would be useful to find out what people thought of those connections. That social research report is the result.

As I have said, the sole purpose of looking at better connectivity must be the things that I have said, which are about economic growth, job creation, building houses and social cohesion. That is the lens through which I have looked at this subject, but I am pleased that you have read the social research. I thought that it was interesting, but the conclusions that I have drawn are about the specific instances of better connectivity that I think will benefit the economy of all the devolved Administrations and of the UK as a whole.

Q18 **Deidre Brock:** So you agreed that that question be asked to various commuters.

Sir Peter Hendy: Yes, I am very happy that the social research was done to a specification that I agreed, but nobody suggested to me that one set of questions should be asked as against another. I think that it is interesting background that, when people travel, they value the cohesion of the Union more. That is not really a surprise to me; I do not know whether it is a surprise to you.

In any event, the recommendations that I have come to are from a different piece of analysis, on which transport links and corridors would best contribute to a better economic—

Q19 **Deidre Brock:** Actually, I want to ask you something lastly. This is out of personal interest, I must admit, because I take the east coast main line very often. You recommend conducting an assessment of the east coast main line and road corridor to determine appropriate investments. Could you share with us the sorts of improvements that you think might be looked at as part of that assessment?

Sir Peter Hendy: Absolutely. First, if you are a regular user of the east coast main line, I hope you know there is a project being executed for the latest 21st century version of signalling to be installed on the southern end of the line, which ought to improve journey times and will certainly improve capacity, which is always short on the east coast main line. Secondly, the Government's recently published integrated railway plan looks at some improvements north of southern section, certainly between York and Newcastle, to improve both journey times and capacity.

North of Newcastle, a number of respondents told me that the A1 was inadequate for the traffic using it and parts of it are not dual carriageway,



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and that the east coast main line was constrained in capacity terms, which we know. My own people at Network Rail—or rather, Andrew Haines’s people at Network Rail—are reflecting on the difficulty of producing an east coast timetable connecting England with Scotland that gives very good journey times for direct services between London and Edinburgh, but also serves intermediate places adequately.

My conclusion from all that was not that I had time to look at each enhancement that could be made, certainly north of Newcastle, but it would be sensible to review on a multi-modal basis the potential demand for those two links and to come out with a proposal that would improve capacity and journey times, and that will be an appropriate way for the UK Government to spend money to improve those links.

Deidre Brock: Thank you very much.

Chair: Sorry, but I’m just going to change the order and bring in Sally-Ann Hart.

Q20 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Thank you, Chair, and good afternoon, Sir Peter. I am just going to look a bit at the environmental considerations for the UK and Scottish Governments and the connectivity review. I know you have made some environmental recommendations, such as better provision of electric vehicle charging points and protection of the natural environment. While formulating your recommendations, to what extent did you prioritise environmental considerations, as well as the UK and Scottish Government climate commitments to achieve net zero for the UK Government by 2050 and for the Scottish Government by 2045?

Sir Peter Hendy: Thank you for the question. I was not going to reproduce the Government’s transport decarbonisation strategy. If there is not as much in this report about decarbonisation and sustainability as people might have thought there should have been, that is because the Government were working on and did produce that strategy in the timescale that I was doing this work. It is fair to say, looking at the recommendations, that when looking at the cross-border corridors for all four nations, whatever the reasons, I largely looked at multi-modal studies because the sustainability of various forms of travel is a major interest.

One of the reasons for looking at railway capacity is, undoubtedly, that there is a renewed interest, and quite rightly so in sustainability terms, in moving more freight to rail. One of the limitations of both the west and the east coast main lines between England and Scotland is the lack of capacity for further freight traffic. One of the reasons I specifically suggested a multi-modal study on the A1 and the east coast main line is in order that one was not persuaded that the A1 needed to be upgraded, when, actually, the right solution might be to increase freight capacity on the east coast main line. I have taken those things into consideration.

I have made some careful recommendations about air travel. I think we would all like better rail journey times between Glasgow, Edinburgh and



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London, because it would transfer air passengers to rail, which, evidently, is more sustainable and environmentally friendly.

My proposal was a rather more careful change to reduce air passenger duty on flights for which rail travel was not really practical—from Inverness and Aberdeen to London, and from Belfast to London. I tried as much as I could to take those factors into account in my recommendations.

You have mentioned electric car charging and the like. If the UK is to have a strategic transport network, one of the ways it ought to be managed is for future sustainability and carbon neutrality.

- Q21 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Thank you for that comprehensive answer. Data shows that the transport sector was responsible for 27% of all emissions in the UK in 2019, and cars were responsible for 55% of those transport emissions. You have mentioned electric charging points, air passenger duty, increasing capacity in rail transport and so on, but which transport initiatives needed to achieve UK emission reduction targets will be hardest to achieve or implement?

Sir Peter Hendy: This is something that I think I know something about, but it is not what I major in. I am very clear that one of the most difficult things to achieve is the decarbonisation of road freight. If you look at the economics of running HGVs, anything that adds to the weight, either in fuel or in power, is really quite difficult. I view that as an opportunity for railway freight.

I think the principal detraction from rail freight is the lack of further capacity on long-distance main lines across mainland UK. That is why I have recommended in a number of areas looking at capacity, which would not only improve passenger journey times but give more capacity to freight. Indeed, I do not think I am wrong; we have more freight on the railway post pandemic than we had before, and we have a lot of interest from companies that are now proposing to use rail, both in bulk haulage and in express logistics, so they think that too.

The whole railway industry ought to be working very hard on the capacity to be able to do more of that. Decarbonising road freight is not technically impossible, but techniques that will leave the economics of running HGVs as they are certainly do not appear to be very easily procured at the moment.

- Q22 **Sally-Ann Hart:** How does increasing rail freight fit in with, or potentially conflict with, UK road upgrades, such as those to the A1, for example? Increased rail freight enables us to target net zero quicker, while emissions from car transport are higher and make up a large proportion of overall transport emissions. How does the balance work between increasing rail freight and capacity, and investing in road connectivity?

Sir Peter Hendy: I think you need to speak to Ministers about the relative amounts of money spent on road and rail improvements. The bulk of UK freight is carried by road. A small reduction in road freight would



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mean a major increase in freight on the railways, which is more sustainable. We on the railway need to be able to produce the train paths that will make a difference. To do so, we need Government help with the infrastructure, but that is going in the right direction. It is not a contradiction to look at road improvement and railway improvement. Both are probably necessities.

Sally-Ann Hart: Thank you, Sir Peter.

Q23 **Mhairi Black:** Thank you for giving us your time, Sir Peter. It has been very useful so far. If I could dig a little deeper into the UK strategic network, do you have an idea yet what the make-up of that body will look like?

Sir Peter Hendy: Yes. On page 33 of my published report, I drew a stylistic map of the links that I thought might comprise a UK strategic transport network. It has some logic and research behind it.

In the end, it is for the Government to decide their policy and how to put it into effect, but I thought that if I spoke about the benefit of such a network without producing some idea of what it might look like, then people might not be able to visualise it or might conclude that I did not have enough data to know what I was talking about, so I produced this stylised map. It is necessarily stylised and relatively small. If the Government take it forward—they say they will—they should do their own work to ensure that the network is right.

That network needs to evolve over time. For example, the location of freeports across the United Kingdom is obviously important for better connectivity. If the network that I have portrayed does not adequately serve all the freeports, then clearly it could be amended to do so.

Q24 **Mhairi Black:** Thank you. I noticed that, in evidence to the Welsh Affairs Committee, you said that you hoped this would not become some kind of “precious board” that would be out of touch and hierarchical. What would be the outcome if, for instance, this new strategic network decided that some new UK-wide plan would be of benefit to Scotland, but the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government disagreed?

Sir Peter Hendy: Obviously, I respect the authority of the Scottish Parliament in respect of the things that have been devolved to it. I think many people were quite apprehensive that I might conclude things to do with the transport network in Scotland that would not be supported by the Scottish Government. As a matter of fact, I do not think that has been the case.

From my reading of the “Strategic Transport Projects Review 2” document, it seems to me that what I concluded in respect of the benefits to the whole United Kingdom of a strategic transport network are very close to what the STPR2 is recommending for Scotland as a whole. I do not think that is a surprise. This is not me suppressing things that I wanted to say that I do not think the Scottish Government would agree with, and I do not think it is them suppressing things that the UK Government would not



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agree with. Why would they? It seems to me that if you do that work in a logical manner—and it has been done in a logical manner both in Scotland and, I would like to think, in my own work—then you come to roughly the same conclusions, and that is what has happened.

I am certainly not advocating some independent body that determines the strategic transport network for the whole UK. The recommendations that I have made often refer to the UK Government working with the devolved Administrations, because it is obviously not desirable for there to be a conflict of views about what that network is or how it should be developed. As a matter of fact, my experience so far is that there is close correlation.

Q25 Mhairi Black: Excellent. I am really glad that that has been your experience, but my concern is that when we are building these networks and infrastructures, we cannot just hope that we are always going to get on. If you look at devolution over the last 20 years, we have had a situation where the UK Government are in no place to determine transport strategy in Scotland. Yet if your report, which has a lot of substance and real logic to it, is implemented in full, is it not the case that transport will no longer be completely devolved, because there will be an avenue for the UK Government to legislate for Scottish transport?

Sir Peter Hendy: I don't know about legislation. It seems to me that the proposition of a strategic network, and that the UK Government could put funding into those parts of the network that they believed were of strategic importance to the United Kingdom, is quite reasonable. There is quite a good history of this, actually. What is now National Highways seems to work well with Transport Scotland on the roads side.

Whether anybody likes it or not, Network Rail is the infrastructure owner and operator of the railway network in the mainland of Great Britain, but we get on very harmoniously with the development of the network, both in Scotland and Wales. It might be considered a rather curious arrangement but, as a matter of fact, Alex Hynes, the managing director of Network Rail in Scotland, is also the managing director of ScotRail, and the arrangements that the Scottish Government are now producing for a public sector operator from April will have Alex in charge of them both. I think that is a really desirable thing.

We are capable, at least in the transport world, of all getting on with each other for the right results. That is very much the spirit in which I wrote my report—that, actually, you have to work together. The A75 is a particularly good example; it matters far more to people in Northern Ireland than it probably does to the Scottish people as a whole, but I am very comforted to read in STPR2 that the Scottish Government say it should be improved. My recommendation for the UK Government to help fund it is hopefully very helpful.

Q26 Mhairi Black: Excellent; thanks. I mentioned your evidence to the Welsh Affairs Committee. There was one sentence that you said that I thought summed it up perfectly. You said: "I hope that they do not supplant the supply of investment money to the devolved Administrations but they use



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UKNET”—the strategic network—“probably quite sparingly”. Have you had any assurances or hints from Government that they agree with that point of view, and that that is their intention as well?

Sir Peter Hendy: Let us turn it around the other way: actually, somebody might have told me off, either privately or publicly, for suggesting that UK Government money should be put into the A75, but nobody ever has. I think the proposition of a UK strategic network would not be much use if it was solely funded by subtracting money from the funding that is available already.

I think that one has to be modest and realistic about how much might therefore be available and to what uses it might be put, but Government is already putting significant money into some of the links that are clearly important for the UK as a whole. You could not argue that the Government was not committed to better connectivity between London, the midlands and the north of England. Through HS2, it is spending the most enormous amount of money.

What I am suggesting is, by comparison, a relatively modest additional expenditure, mostly in England, actually—on the west coast main line between Crewe and Carlisle—to improve journey times and capacity to Scotland. That seems to me to be a reasonable proposition, and certainly I have had no suggestion to date from anybody in Government that they disagree with that. If the network is endorsed, I hope that they will go forward with the development money that produces those improvements for the benefit of the whole of the UK.

Mhairi Black: Excellent. Thanks, Chair.

Q27 **Wendy Chamberlain:** Thank you, Sir Peter, for joining us this afternoon. I will continue on the theme of UKNET and the roles of the devolved Administrations and the UK Government. I suppose, from listening to the evidence so far this afternoon, my view would be that a strategic network—whether we have defined it or not—does exist within the UK. You have obviously pointed out some of the examples. I also find it interesting that there is an all-Ireland strategic rail review ongoing just now between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, with the public consultation closing at the weekend. I agree with your principle that it makes sense to have those discussions for economic benefit.

Can you tell me what you foresee is the role of the devolved Administrations and the UK Government? In response to your interim report, Michael Matheson, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport in Scotland, said, “It is not for the UK Government to determine what constitutes a strategic road in Scotland,” but my understanding from what you have said this afternoon is that that is not what has been suggested.

Sir Peter Hendy: Let me get my thoughts together before I speak. It seems to me, as I have already said, that there is a very large degree of commonality between the views of the devolved Administrations and the UK as a whole about which parts of the network are important, but the



transport network, as you say, does not have hard borders, and many travellers cross the border. The Scottish border is probably a longer-distance border for fewer people to cross, because of its nature, compared with the Welsh border, which meanders around and several transport links cross it several times. None the less, I have not found, in the response to the Scottish transport projects review and in my discussions with both the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales, any dispute about what I have identified as things that are important to do.

I sort of agree with you that if you look at the all-Ireland strategic rail network review, it is a pretty natural thing to do. Travellers cross borders because they want to get from one place to another, so looking at transport as a whole network thing is the right thing to do. I don't think there is any difference between the map that I have drawn of my idea of what the strategic transport network might be and the general views of the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland about what would need to be done.

Q28 Wendy Chamberlain: Thank you. Mhairi Black picked up on the "precious board" comment that you made previously. We received today, and noted in our private meeting, a letter from Michael Gove in relation to the intergovernmental review of how the UK Government and the devolved nations work together. Is that how you potentially see this work being taken forward, rather than through the creation of some other UKNET-overseeing body? Do you think that it should take a natural part in among the cross-cutting portfolios that are simply in the nature of devolution in the UK?

Sir Peter Hendy: I am afraid that I am not party to Mr Gove's letter, so I am not aware of what it says. But if your general premise is, "Why set up something special when it can be dealt with in the normal course of events?", I completely agree. I have never thought that there would be some grand board to determine this network and to manage it especially. I thought the Government would simply decide what to do through proper analysis and decision making and discussion with the devolved authorities, and then go forward with it as a concept. It does not seem to me to need a grand board with a load of people meeting specially. It needs the Government to have made its mind up and to review it on a regular basis.

Q29 Wendy Chamberlain: Yes, and to have those conversations accordingly.

This is my final question. I understand that Mark Drakeford, the First Minister of Wales, told the Senedd on 30 November that he was "very pleased" to see the full review and "the way that it endorsed the Welsh approach to improving transport across Wales". You have said several times this afternoon that you have noted the alignment between your review and the Scottish transport projects paper that has come out in the last few days. Do you feel, therefore, that the First Minister of Scotland could say something similar in relation to your report?

Sir Peter Hendy: That is a leading question. That is up to them. If they would like to, I would be very pleased. I note with some confidence that STPR2, inasmuch as it deals with the subjects that I dealt with about



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cross-border communications, is extremely close. I think that is very welcome for Scotland, England and the UK Government.

- Q30 **Douglas Ross:** Good afternoon, Sir Peter. Can I go back to points that were raised earlier? I just want to get some issues on the record. We are currently engaged once again with Scotland's Finance Cabinet Secretary, Kate Forbes, who gave evidence to this Committee last year. In her evidence, as the *Hansard* record will show, she stated that the Scottish Government were not involved in the Union connectivity review. She is quoted as saying the Scottish Government were "intentionally and specifically excluded" from that review, and she went on to say they were included only to rubber-stamp projects. Are the comments of Kate Forbes, the SNP's Finance Minister, correct?

Sir Peter Hendy: I have never spoken to her. I have seen the words that you refer to, but I am always very careful not to assume that people said what they are reported to have said, because I have spent most of my career disputing what it is that I have been reported to have said. I did not take that to heart.

I did have two good conversations with Mr Matheson. He was quite clear about his view about the responsibility of the Scottish Government for those elements of transport that have been devolved to it. I respect that, because he is an elected politician in Scotland. But I have done my work anyway, because that is what I was asked to do. As I have said to several of your colleagues already, I am very pleased to see the very close correlation between what I have suggested about connections with Scotland and the rest of the UK, and what STPR2 says. I am not so bothered about what people might say in the course of commenting about the work while I was doing it. I am very pleased indeed that the outcome is such a good correlation.

- Q31 **Douglas Ross:** I commend you for your restraint. However, we politicians expect our witnesses to give accurate evidence when they come before us. Can I check on something that you said earlier? Did you meet or engage with Cabinet Secretary Matheson in 2020 and 2021?

Sir Peter Hendy: I did indeed. I have the dates here: 26 November 2020 and 9 March 2021. Sadly, they were both virtual meetings. I was sitting in the same chair as I am now, having barely moved for months.

- Q32 **Douglas Ross:** Like many of us. On those two occasions, in 2020 and 2021, were you asking Michael Matheson to rubber-stamp projects?

Sir Peter Hendy: No. I was talking to him in one case about the work I had been asked to do and to what extent he wanted to give me some views on it. Secondly, in March '21, we spoke about the forthcoming publication of my interim report. I would say that Mr Matheson listened carefully to what I had to say. In response, I listened very carefully to what he had to say to me.

- Q33 **Douglas Ross:** Thank you. This is my final question on this point. Did the Union connectivity review "intentionally and specifically exclude" the



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Scottish Government?

Sir Peter Hendy: No.

Q34 **Douglas Ross:** Thank you. In terms of wider consultation in Scotland, while the Scottish Government asked their officials not to engage, did you have responses? I know I met you as a Scottish MP. Did you have engagement with MPs, MSPs, council group leaders and so forth because these individuals wanted to engage with the connectivity review?

Sir Peter Hendy: Yes. The officials made, on my behalf, a general call for evidence. As a consequence, I had responses from 33 Scottish stakeholders out of a total of 147 responses, though many of the other responses were from UK-wide organisations that had embraced comments from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as England. Included in that were several local authorities from the south to the north of Scotland, a number of Scottish business organisations and, indeed, a number of Members of Parliament and Members of the Scottish Parliament.

Q35 **Douglas Ross:** Thank you. On the Scottish Government's decision to tell their officials not to engage, was that replicated in the other devolved Administrations or were they unique in that approach to your review?

Sir Peter Hendy: They were unique. The officials in Wales and Northern Ireland—both officials of Government and of the transport bodies—spoke to me, but of course I was able to use a large amount of published information from Scotland, which I duly did.

Q36 **Douglas Ross:** Thank you. You have spoken a lot about links to central Scotland and what we can do with regard to that. Obviously, there was the option of the bridge or tunnel from Northern Ireland to Scotland, and the impact that it would have on the south of Scotland. Do you think that there is enough in your report, or could there be more, for rural areas in Scotland, which have major connectivity issues not just with other parts of the UK but indeed within Scotland itself?

Sir Peter Hendy: I have had regard to other parts of Scotland and the central belt. You will see in my proposed version of the strategic transport network main links to Inverness and Aberdeen, and links to Fort William, across to Stornoway and up to the north of Scotland in Thurso and on to the Orkneys. It is clear that rural communities, and rural communities in faraway places, need as good connectivity as can be produced and afforded. That is also why I had quite a lot to say about air services other than to Glasgow and Edinburgh in Scotland, because they are clearly important for business and for economic and social living purposes. I hope that I have had appropriate regard. It seems to me that we do need to pay some attention to that. One of the reasons that I made some detailed recommendations about air passenger duty and the PSO air services is because they clearly are lifelines to places that will never be terribly accessible by rail or road because of their distance from major conurbations.

Q37 **Douglas Ross:** Indeed. When we had a separate evidence session on the topic of aviation in Scotland, the Union connectivity review was



commented on very favourably by our witnesses from airports, including HIAL. I ask about rural Scotland because a number of projects at the moment are now under threat—for example, the dualling of the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverness. The coalition in Scotland between the SNP and the Greens has put this up for a review. Do you see a scenario where long promised projects by the Scottish Government that may now be under threat could, or should, be supported by the UK Government because of the vital connectivity required between communities such as Aberdeen and Inverness, and vital areas in between, including my own Moray constituency?

Sir Peter Hendy: There is a limit to what I was asked to do. You will see that, although I drew my view of the strategic transport network for the whole of the UK, I concentrated on those links that are cross-border, for the obvious reason that that is mainly what I was asked to do. Clearly, I was not asked to review the Scottish Government or any other devolved Administration's management of their own networks. I have put some views to the extent to which it correlates with the question that I was asked, which was about the whole of the United Kingdom.

There clearly are important improvements to be made on transport links within the devolved Administrations. Without looking at them, the only thing that I would say is that one of the reasons that I have looked in the rest of my recommendations very largely at multimodal studies is that, if somebody decides not to improve roads for the benefit of road users and freight traffic, you have to look elsewhere at what improvements might be made if that traffic is displaced somewhere else. There is a deliberate intention in my recommendations—not about Aberdeen to Inverness, which I did not look at, but elsewhere—to look at what multimodal studies can do, and where the best place is to spend money. I have no view on that, I'm afraid, because I did not look at it.

Q38 **Douglas Ross:** Thank you. A final question from me: what is the future of your review and the recommendations? When are you going to, or how will you continuously, gauge how the recommendations have been implemented? What authority or powers will you have if you feel they are not being implemented as quickly as they could or should be?

Sir Peter Hendy: I think the straight answer to that is that I was asked to produce recommendations and I have done so. If the UK Government or, indeed, the devolved Administrations asked me to look at how they were being implemented, I am sure that, if I had the time and the inclination, I would do that. I am expecting a response from Government. In fact, I am informed that the roundtables chaired by Baroness Vere, one of the Transport Ministers, that I have attended two of—we did one with the Welsh stakeholders last week and one with Scottish stakeholders this morning—are part of the Government's work on taking a view about its response to my report, and I welcome that, because obviously it will be sensible to find out whether stakeholders generally believe that I have done what I was asked to do and whether they agree with it.



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I believe that the Government are going to respond in the spring. I am very encouraged by the fact that some money was made available to start the detailed reviews on individual corridors at the time of my interim report last March, and that further money was made available in the spending review around the time of the publication of my final report. I feel relatively confident that the Government are going to take this seriously. They have not asked me to review this in one year, two years and five years—they may discover that I've got a bit long in the tooth by the time we get there. And that is their business, not mine.

I have been asked to produce some policy recommendations, not to implement the policy, except in respect of my job at Network Rail. But I am encouraged by the Government's response and, in particular, the allocation of some money. Nobody has said to me that anything I have said is unacceptable, and there is an audience that might have imagined that to be so, especially with regard to my recommendation about allocating additional money to the A75. I am cautiously optimistic, but now I shall be watching what the Government do, rather than commenting on it, at least in public or to the media.

Douglas Ross: Thank you, Sir Peter. We will all be watching what the Government do. And thank you, Chair.

Q39 **Chair:** Can I end the session by asking a couple of questions about HS2? For your report, you were asked to look at the Golborne link, which according to my notes would link HS2 and the west coast main line. I don't think you came up with any firm conclusion about what should happen with that. Can you give us just a little bit of your thinking about what should happen in order that HS2 is made to be for the benefit of rail users in Scotland?

Sir Peter Hendy: The Golborne link, I believe, forms part of—I haven't seen what has been deposited in Parliament this morning, so I'm not sure whether it forms part of that or part of a deposition that is shortly to be made. But what I do know, because I have been advised about it, is that the stage at which it could have been excluded has passed for the moment. What I said was that some work needs to be done about whether it is the best connection between HS2 north of Crewe and the west coast main line, for the benefit of services to and from Scotland. I don't know what the answer to that is; I haven't gone into it in enough detail. I have just posed the question and I am sure that there are people within the Department for Transport and Government who will look at whether Golborne is the best thing. My own people, our own people, Andrew's people at Network Rail will also have a view on it. But I didn't go further than that.

What I do know is that it's very, very important for HS2 to be properly connected to the west coast main line north of Crewe, because every minute off the London, Birmingham and Manchester journey time to Edinburgh and Scotland is a persuasive reason why people should take the train and not fly, which is environmentally beneficial and also creates more



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capacity for goods. It is a very important decision, but I am not a further party to deciding how that is taken forward.

- Q40 **Chair:** Absolutely. Given the amount of funds that has been spent on HS2 and just how big a part of the UK Government's transport programme that is, I wondered if you were not tempted to talk about bringing HS2 to Scotland, if you wanted to make a huge and significant difference to connectivity across the whole of the UK? Surely, the defining jewel in the crown of the Hendy review would then have been to link Scotland to London in under three hours, with links to the rest of Europe, so people like us could travel seamlessly to Paris in five hours. Would that not have been the sort of Union connectivity that would have made a real difference?

Sir Peter Hendy: There will be plenty of people in Government, even if it is not you, who think they might have had enough of grandiose, very expensive transport projects. I am practical about this. It is extremely unlikely that you could ever justify the enormous costs of building a new railway from Crewe to Glasgow and Edinburgh. The topography is difficult and the amount of traffic you could reasonably expect is quite small.

- Q41 **Chair:** How can other small countries do this? You'll have been to Denmark, Switzerland and Finland. They all seem to have perfectly good, fast high-speed railways. Surely, we should be a bit more ambitious for Scotland rather than say that we can never do it.

Sir Peter Hendy: I am very willing to be ambitious, but what I would like immediately is for Scotland to see the benefit of that part of HS2 that the Government are building and are committed to build. By far the fastest and most practicable way of doing that is to improve the west coast main line. If it is properly improved, it is likely to produce if not three-hour journey times to Glasgow and Edinburgh from London, then three hours and a little bit. That will be enough to make a significant transfer of passenger traffic and afford much greater transport of goods to and from Scotland.

You might think that I am not ambitious enough. There are other people who didn't much like the recommendation about the fixed link to Northern Ireland. All I can say to you is that I believe I have produced a practicable set of recommendations that is capable of being taken forward, in at least that part of my lifetime that is left to me, at the age of 68.

- Q42 **Chair:** Have the Government said to you when we can expect the response to your review? Do you have any idea when we will see that?

Sir Peter Hendy: I am getting used to Governments talking in seasons. I am expecting a response in the spring.

Chair: Okay. We will leave it there. Sir Peter, it has been an absolute pleasure speaking to you. Thank you ever so much for answering our questions so comprehensively and fully. It has been a very helpful session. We may want to speak to you once we have seen the Government's view and we will certainly want to look at some of the issues concerning this



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again, but, in the meantime, we are grateful for your time at the Scottish Affairs Committee this afternoon.