



Pete Wishart MP
Chair
Scottish Affairs Committee

27 September 2021

Dear Pete,

UNION CONNECTIVITY REVIEW

Further to the meeting of the Scottish Affairs Select Committee on September 6, I would like to address points made by Scottish Government Finance Secretary Kate Forbes relating to Sir Peter Hendy's independent Union Connectivity Review (UCR). As you know, the objective of the UCR is to identify transport projects that could improve connectivity across the UK, to boost economic growth, social cohesion and quality of life for our citizens.

During her evidence to the committee, Ms Forbes claimed: "The irony of this whole situation is that having been completely and intentionally excluded from anything to do with the Union Connectivity Review, we then get the call to say, 'let's rubber-stamp the projects that the UK Government have chosen', and also in the same breath get criticised for not having been more involved with a process that intentionally and specifically excluded the Scottish Government."

I would like to set the record straight on Ms Forbes's claim that the Scottish Government has been deliberately excluded from the UCR.

Sir Peter met Mr Matheson twice to discuss the review and has sought to engage with all of the devolved administrations throughout the UCR process. He has also been in contact with Scottish stakeholders as well as politicians from across the parties including the SNP.

In June last year, UK Transport Minister Baroness Vere tried to arrange a call with the Scottish Government's Transport Secretary Michael Matheson when the UCR was announced. Mr Matheson was unavailable.

UK Transport Secretary Grant Shapps spoke with Mr Matheson ahead of the UCR's formal launch in October last year and the UK Government has made continual offers of engagement over the last 12 months, including a letter from Mr Shapps asking for a meeting to discuss the £20m Union Connectivity Development Fund which received no response.

We subsequently were led to understand via a meeting with Transport Scotland officials that Scottish Government ministers would not be engaging with the Union Connectivity Review or the development funding on offer. This has caused Scotland to be the only part of the UK to miss out on the opportunity to access this additional investment.

I am sure that the Scottish Government shares our ambitions to improve connectivity, economic growth and social cohesion between communities. I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise again that the UK Government is always ready to engage to discuss the Union Connectivity Development Fund and demonstrate how we can work together for the benefit of citizens across the UK.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Iain Stewart'.

IAIN STEWART MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND