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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Monday 20 June 2022

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Knife Crime and Serious Violence

1. **Anna Firth** (Southend West) (Con): What plans she has to tackle knife crime and serious violence. [900574]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): The Government work to steer young people away from crime through tough enforcement and dedicated programmes. We have supported the police with investment of over £170 million in the areas worst affected by violence, and on stop-and-search powers. A further £170 million will support violence reduction units, which are fundamental in tackling the root causes of violence.

Anna Firth: Knife crime and antisocial behaviour is, sadly, all too prevalent in Southend, as the weekend's events showed. Our excellent local police want state-of-the-art, portable electronic knife polls, which are cheaper and more effective than knife arch systems. Does the Secretary of State agree that having those in place by the holiday period must be a priority for Southend police?

Priti Patel: May I congratulate my hon. Friend on the assiduous way in which she has made representations to me and the Home Office directly on this issue? She has a great relationship with Essex police, which is a very robust police force on this issue. She highlighted a practical solution in terms of how knife crime can be and is being addressed through knife polls, and I have seen in her constituency some of the exceptional work taking place on that.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): The National Crime Agency is responsible for tackling the organised crime gangs who drive up so much of the knife crime, violence and drug abuse that we see on our streets. Why, then, has the Home Secretary asked it to draw up plans for 20% cuts?

Priti Patel: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. There are no plans to cut National Crime Agency funding. Its budget has increased every year since 2019-20 and, as part of the 2021 spending review, we secured a

settlement over the period of more than £810 million. For the benefit of the Labour party, there are no plans to cut NCA funding.

Support for People Fleeing War in Ukraine

2. **Robert Largan** (High Peak) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support people fleeing war in Ukraine. [900575]

6. **Mr Richard Holden** (North West Durham) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support people fleeing war in Ukraine. [900580]

14. **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support people fleeing war in Ukraine. [900588]

21. **Dehenna Davison** (Bishop Auckland) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support people fleeing war in Ukraine. [900596]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): This week, we mark Refugee Week. The UK has a long, proud history of welcoming refugees and the Government have introduced two new, safe routes for Ukrainian nationals—the Ukraine family scheme and the Homes for Ukraine scheme—as part of our commitment to the people of Ukraine during the awful conflict with Russia. Arrivals under those schemes will be able to live and work in the UK for up to three years and, of course, they will have full and unrestricted access to benefits, healthcare, employment and other support. We have also introduced the Ukraine extension scheme, permitting Ukrainians already in the UK to extend their stays.

Robert Largan: I am proud that a large number of my constituents have welcomed Ukrainian families into their homes as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and I am pleased to have been able to help a number of those families now living in the High Peak to navigate the visa application process. However, some of those children have had their applications for local schools rejected. May I urge the Home Secretary to have urgent conversations with the Department for Education on solving this issue so that children who are here having fled a war zone can continue their education?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend raises an important point. If I may, on behalf of all of us in Government, I will thank and commend all members of the British public who have been supporting our schemes. It is important that we do everything we can across Government to support the education of children in our schools. In April, the Secretary of State for Education got in touch with every single local authority chief executive officer as well as directors of children's services to outline clearly the requirements on schools and the funding coming from Government. I will of course pick up any points that my hon. Friend has from his constituency and raise them directly.

Mr Holden: Does my right hon. Friend agree that our compassionate approach to refugees from Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan can be maintained with public confidence

only if we are also robust in dealing with illegal channel crossings, and the human traffickers who peddle in human misery?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct: this is about deterring those dangerous crossings, deterring people smugglers, and carrying on with the long-standing and assiduous work that is taking place through our intelligence and security services and the National Crime Agency, and also upstream. This is about public confidence in the system. We are a generous country, but to maintain that means that we take action, so that we can be fair to those who come to our country, and firm on those who, quite frankly, are exploiting our country.

John Lamont: More than 70 Ukrainians have now found a place to call home in the safety of the Scottish Borders through the UK Government's Homes for Ukraine scheme. What support is being offered to local authorities in Scotland to assist their new residents?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend raises an important point about local authority support. This is a whole Government effort, as well as a UK-wide effort to support families and the Homes for Ukraine scheme. With that, the Government have been clear, as has the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, about funding through that Department of more than £10,500 per person arriving under the scheme. We must ensure that we are supporting local authorities, and that the scheme is fair and equitable. In addition, we are ensuring that local authorities undertake all the necessary checks and safeguarding provisions that are required.

Dehenna Davison: Last Wednesday I was honoured to welcome my constituents Mark Rumble and Lucy Needham to Parliament, alongside Alina, the Ukrainian refugee who they are hosting. Mark and Lucy praised the ease and speed of the visa application process, but raised some concerns that they were given very little information about how to support Alina in settling in with things such as registering with a GP, completing her biometric checks, and getting a national insurance number. Will the Home Secretary consider Mark's suggestion of producing a clear and comprehensive welcome pack for every Ukrainian refugee, so that they and their host families can ensure that the refugee settles in as quickly as possible?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend raises an important question, as well as some practical points that are constantly being addressed through the scheme. Welcome packs have been provided, and the Departments for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, for Education, and of Health and Social Care have, through local authorities, received support and guidance from central Government. I thank my hon. Friend's constituent for what he is doing, and for his suggestions. Much of that information is on gov.uk, but if there is more we can do—it sounds as if there is—we will join this up, and I will pick up that representation directly.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Last week the Home Affairs Committee met Ukrainian MPs who told us that they had had to travel 11 hours to get their visa from the visa application

centre in Poland, then 11 hours back, and then again to have the visa stamped. They wanted me to ask the Home Secretary about young people and children travelling with grandparents and elder siblings, who are not eligible for visas under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Will the Home Office look at that again, because all the necessary paperwork is there to ensure that those children are travelling with their parents' consent?

Priti Patel: The right hon. Lady and many other colleagues have raised this point over recent weeks and months. We are looking at this issue, and a lot of work is taking place across the Home Office with the Minister for Refugees and DLUHC, regarding the safeguarding aspects. We are going to make changes and, without pre-empting any of those now, a lot of work is taking place, primarily because the focus has to be on the safety and wellbeing of those children. We must ensure that they get here in the right way and are supported. We will report back on that issue, because a lot of work is taking place on it right now.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The small village of Golspie in Sutherland will shortly be hosting seven families from Ukraine. There is no lack of people in the Highlands volunteering to put up those good people, who are getting as far as the UK but seem to be getting blocked in hotels and not getting to the families in the Highlands. Will the Home Secretary talk to the Scottish Government with a view to sorting out that logjam?

Priti Patel: Absolutely. If the hon. Gentleman would like to share any details with me regarding where the barriers are, we will definitely pick that up. The whole point about Homes for Ukraine, and the work across the whole Government, is that where there are bottlenecks we must unblock them and ensure a safe passage. We must ensure that people are welcomed in the right way, so that they can be settled and their needs met as soon as they come to our country.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): Further to the point from my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson), my constituent contacted me on 9 May regarding a child trying to enter Ukraine with a legal guardian. Her visa has been blocked because she has been classified as an unaccompanied minor, because she is travelling with a legal guardian and not a parent. My office has raised this with the Home Office and I have written directly to the Secretary of State. Please can she look into this case urgently?

Priti Patel: Yes, I will pick up this case directly following questions today. As I have said, there are some measures coming together now on this, because we have to do it in the right way, but I will come back to the hon. Lady.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): On Friday, when I visited my local food bank, I met a young woman who had fled Ukraine with her two-year-old son. While she is waiting for her universal credit payments to come through, she has been left without anything, and she was queueing to get food and nappies. How can this be right when they have fled the horror of war?

What will the Home Secretary do with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that every Ukrainian refugee who arrives here gets the support they need immediately?

Priti Patel: The hon. Lady has raised not only a very serious case, but some of the challenges that people are facing. She has asked me directly what I will do with the DWP. In fact, there is a cross-Government taskforce on this, bringing all Departments together—it is not just DWP. The hon. Lady has already heard me speak about DLUHC and the money that has gone directly to local authorities to support individuals. If I can pick up with her post-questions directly on this case, we will follow that up, but I also think she has illustrated how the system needs to come together at a local level.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson, Stuart C. McDonald.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It was a great privilege to join the Chair of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson), last week in meeting Ukrainian MPs who had arrived in London after meetings in Dublin. Given nobody had checked their passports between visa-free Ireland and here, they rightly asked, “How on earth can the UK’s visa scheme possibly be justified on the grounds of security when Ukrainians can properly travel to Ireland visa-free and then onwards to here?” I emphasise that their main concern was this lack of a policy to ensure that children accompanied by relatives other than parents can come to the UK. I recognise that the Home Secretary has said that this is being looked at, but I also understand the policy has been promised for some time—can we get it urgently?

Priti Patel: In response to the hon. Gentleman’s latter point, the policy is being worked on urgently and it is across Departments right now, which is why it is taking some time to come together, but we will report back on that. On the issue of travelling from Ireland, as we have debated in this House many times, it is right that we hold up the integrity of the checks in our systems, and this Government have done that consistently for all overseas nationals coming to the United Kingdom. That has been applied consistently, even during the Afghanistan crisis, and that is this Government’s policy.

Antisocial Behaviour

3. **Robbie Moore** (Keighley) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour. [900577]

19. **Shaun Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour. [900594]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Rachel Maclean): The beating crime plan set out the Government’s enduring commitment to driving down antisocial behaviour. Home Office statutory guidance supports local areas to make effective use of the powers available to them. That includes advice on the community trigger—an important safety net for victims

—and we have also provided funding for local initiatives to tackle antisocial behaviour through the safer streets fund.

Robbie Moore: As the Home Secretary will be aware from her recent visit to Keighley, where she met our hard-working neighbourhood policing team, antisocial behaviour is unfortunately an undeniable problem and is having a detrimental impact on many businesses, residents and those going about their day-to-day lives. I was therefore delighted to see the Government launch round 4 of the safer streets fund with a specific focus on antisocial behaviour. Can my hon. Friend confirm that this will help drive a positive change in Keighley and beyond?

Rachel Maclean: I very much thank my hon. Friend for his question. I know that my colleague the Home Secretary very much enjoyed her visit, and we all wish to thank the neighbourhood policing team for all that they do. We are aware of the impact that antisocial behaviour has, and that is why this Government have introduced round 4 of the safer streets fund, as my hon. Friend said. That is a practical set of initiatives to tackle that behaviour, and it includes improved street lighting, increased CCTV and training to change attitudes and behaviours, all of which tackle antisocial behaviour. I expect to see some real change in his area.

Shaun Bailey: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her response. Unfortunately, antisocial behaviour continues to blight my residents in Wednesbury, Oldbury and Tipton, nowhere more so than in the Laburnum Road area of Tipton which has seen a spike in reports. Will my hon. Friend touch a little more on the cross-working that she is doing, particularly with stakeholders in the Black Country, such as West Midlands police and Sandwell Council, to ensure we really do have a community-led approach to tackling antisocial behaviour?

Rachel Maclean: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that this is a multi-agency and community approach. Yes, of course, the police are responsible for tackling and dealing with antisocial behaviour, which is why we are providing £695 million funding to West Midlands police, an increase of £40 million. The force has also been able to recruit over 1,000 additional officers. It is also the case that we have provided the police with additional powers. It is vital that the police work with their local police and crime commissioner and other agencies with responsibility for tackling this behaviour.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): In Bristol, we have a successful e-scooter rental pilot, but we also see people using e-scooters illegally and using rental e-scooters on the pavement. That can be very scary for people trying to walk along the pavement while that is happening. I know the Government are looking to legalise and regulate private ownership, but how will the Home Office team work with the Department for Transport team to ensure the police have the powers to stop them being misused in a way that scares people who are just trying to go about their daily business?

Rachel Maclean: The hon. Lady speaks of an issue that both she and I have some experience of—when I was in the Department for Transport, she was my shadow.

The Department is introducing new legislation to deal with some of these issues. Until that is on the statute book, however, it is the responsibility of the police to deal with the issue, and they have clear guidance: riding an e-scooter on the pavement is illegal in all circumstances. We welcome new forms of transport, but of course they must be introduced safely and ridden responsibly.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): The hon. Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore) is right to ask the Government what they are doing to tackle antisocial behaviour. In his constituency total recorded crime went up by 59% from 2011-12 to 2020-21, which highlights the Conservative Government's track record, a damning one at that. No wonder crime is up. Action on antisocial behaviour is down since his Government took out 7,000 neighbourhood police officers—a cut of 30%—so the 1,000 the Minister just mentioned does not quite cut it. Will the Minister tell the House why the Government do not believe in neighbourhood policing, as they have clearly given up on it with the cuts they have made?

Rachel Maclean: The hon. Lady is completely wrong in the contention she puts forward to the House. This Government introduced the beating crime plan, which puts tackling antisocial behaviour at its heart. This is the Government who are increasing funding to the police, bringing more officers on to the streets to tackle this and other issues. I remind her that her area in West Yorkshire has 589 additional officers and we have increased funding by £31 million. It is for local police and crime commissioners, including the Labour Mayor of West Yorkshire, to use that funding and the powers they have been given to tackle this issue.

National Security

4. **Chris Clarkson** (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to ensure national security. [900578]

15. **Paul Holmes** (Eastleigh) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to ensure national security. [900589]

The Minister for Security and Borders (Damian Hinds): Our national security is the first responsibility and priority of the Government, and we are ensuring that our world-class security and intelligence services and counterterrorism police are supported in their work with the tools and the legislative framework they need to keep us safe. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to them for all they do.

Chris Clarkson: When it comes to the Rwanda policy, the Labour party is all over the shop. The left hand does not know what the far left hand is doing. The other day the Leader of the Opposition's spokesman said that they could not rule out maintaining this policy, while the shadow immigration Minister told the BBC that they would definitely scrap it. While the Labour party works out if it has a policy at all, can I ask my right hon. Friend for an assurance that we will be working to break the vile business model of people traffickers by making sure that the Rwanda flights get off the ground soon?

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend is quite right that we hear plenty of opposing from the Opposition, but not much proposing: they complain, but they do not have a plan. Our partnership with Rwanda is strong and supports a proportionate, humane approach. We are determined to deter the wicked people smugglers and the great damage that they bring to human life.

Paul Holmes: The MI5 director general recently said:

“It must be right that Parliament looks at modernising the powers the State has to protect us all from the full range of today's threats.”

Can my right hon. Friend confirm that we are heeding the director general's advice, and that our National Security Bill will protect us from a range of emerging threats, including cyber-attacks and interference in elections?

Damian Hinds: I can. May I take the opportunity to thank my hon. Friend for all his work in support of our national security while he was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Home Secretary in the Department?

The National Security Bill will keep pace with the changing threat and will make the UK an ever harder target for states that seek to conduct hostile acts against us. It will be an offence for foreign powers to improperly interfere with the UK's democracy. The Bill will address the serious threat from state-backed attacks on assets, including sites, data and infrastructure critical to the UK's safety or interests.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Has the Home Secretary considered the dangers to freedom of the press that the National Security Bill presents? Many of my constituents are concerned that measures that could prevent journalists from publishing stories of public interest are undemocratic.

Damian Hinds: No, I do not see a danger to journalistic freedoms. Indeed, the Government are taking stringent steps to ensure, for example, that in the Online Safety Bill journalistic rights and freedoms are absolutely to the fore, because of the vital and irreplaceable role that a free and sometimes boisterous media plays in underpinning and challenging us in our democracy.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): Canada, one of our Five Eyes partners, recently announced sanctions against Alexander Lebedev as one of 14 people who

“have directly enabled Vladimir Putin's senseless war in Ukraine and bear responsibility for the pain and suffering of the people of Ukraine.”

I have asked this question of the Government six times now, but I have not had anything resembling an answer: did the Prime Minister meet Alexander Lebedev without officials and without close protection during the Salisbury poisonings in April 2018—yes or no?

Damian Hinds: I do not know the detailed contents of either individual's diary. What I can tell the hon. Lady and the House is that this Government have acted on sanctions against Putin-linked elites—the people who have propped up and supported that regime—without fear or favour. That extends to more than 1,000 individuals, entities and subsidiaries, and we will do more as required.

Points-based Immigration System: Labour Shortages

5. **Wendy Chamberlain** (North East Fife) (LD): What assessment she has made of the potential impact of the points-based immigration system on labour shortages. [900579]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): Our immigration system works in the interests of our whole United Kingdom by covering a broad range of occupations across many sectors for firms looking to attract the talent that they need, while ensuring that the domestic labour market is supported—yet recruitment issues are not unique to the UK, and immigration must not be seen as an alternative to improved pay, conditions and training for key workers.

Wendy Chamberlain: There is a severe shortage of care workers around the UK. In St Andrews in my constituency, a social care business had to shut down recently because of staffing issues. My inbox is increasingly full of messages from people who are waiting for care-at-home packages. One way of helping would be to allow asylum seekers to work while their claims are being processed: it would allow them to support themselves and would mitigate the worst of the shortages. Will the Secretary of State and the Minister consider that?

Kevin Foster: That is an interesting one. Those whose asylum claim has been outstanding for more than a year can take jobs on the shortage occupations list, which has included care workers since February. One of the slight issues, of course, is that until very recently, 31 out of the 32 local authority areas in Scotland, including the hon. Lady's, refused to be part of the dispersal accommodation system. Now that we have made the change to full dispersal, some of those people will actually be living in those areas.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): If I give the Minister the details, will he kindly take a personal interest in the unusual plight of two young Russian charity volunteers who are now stranded in my constituency through no fault of their own? They are not supporters of President Putin. They have the opportunity to work as care workers, but in their present plight they cannot do so. They cannot be the only people caught up in such a situation. I would be very grateful if the Government looked sympathetically on their plight.

Kevin Foster: My right hon. Friend will appreciate that I cannot give comments and pledges from the Dispatch Box, but I am very happy to meet him, and he highlights a valid point. Russia is not Putin. Putin likes to say that he embodies everything Russian, but he does not. There are plenty of Russians who have suffered under his regime and are vehemently opposed to his illegal and disgraceful actions in Ukraine.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): The reality out in the country is that we have labour shortages across multiple sectors, 1.3 million job vacancies, the most persistent post-pandemic drop in employment in the G7, operations not being carried out in our hospitals, restaurants and the hospitality industry being unable to recruit staff, and a shortage of drivers to drive produce

around the country. Why will the Minister not act pragmatically and immediately, introduce more work visas where there are shortages, lift the ban on asylum seekers working and have an independent review of the impact of ending freedom of movement?

Kevin Foster: The hon. Member might benefit from taking some time to look at the labour markets across most of the developed world, including the European Union. He will see that shortages in many areas, such as hospitality, are not unique to the United Kingdom. I find interesting his calls for the resurrection of free movement, given what we understand his party's emerging policy to be.

Visa Processing Times

7. **Greg Clark** (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of processing times for visas applied for by people from countries other than Ukraine. [900581]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): UK Visas and Immigration is prioritising applications in response to the humanitarian crisis caused by the invasion of Ukraine, so applications for other visas are taking longer to process, particularly when combined with surging demand globally for visitor visas. We understand the impact of delays to customers, so resources are being returned visa routes impacted by these prioritisation decisions, with a focus on visit, work and study routes. We will also prioritise any compelling or compassionate cases.

Greg Clark: I recognise the extraordinary efforts that the Department has made to process tens of thousands of visas for Ukrainians, and I pay tribute to the staff who have based themselves in Portcullis House to provide updates to Members. My office is dealing with many applications from people from other countries, such as Afghanistan and India, and they are not getting the updates and information that applicants from Ukraine are getting. Will the Minister consider applying some of the positive lessons to make sure that other applicants at least know that they are not being forgotten, and so that they get updates on their cases?

Kevin Foster: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question, and I know the team in Portcullis House will appreciate his praise. We are looking at the learnings from the hub-style approach in Portcullis House, which I think has been useful. Feedback from across the House has been very positive about its ability to chase up casework for Members. As we modernise our immigration system, we are also looking at how to give people an experience like that on our modernised routes—for example, the skilled worker route and applications from European economic area nationals via AUK2—which provide a range of updates automatically without applicants having to ask for them, and we are considering how we can apply that when hon. Members or customers get in touch. We want to make the process much more automated, so that there is less need for people to request updates.

Passport Application Processing Times

8. **Richard Thomson** (Gordon) (SNP): How many and what proportion of passport applications that were received over 10 weeks ago have not yet been processed. [900582]

12. **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): How many and what proportion of passport applications that were received over 10 weeks ago have not yet been processed. [900586]

17. **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): How many and what proportion of passport applications that were received over 10 weeks ago have not yet been processed. [900591]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): Across March, April and May, Her Majesty's Passport Office completed the processing of approximately 3 million passport applications, with 98.5% of those from the UK being completed within the published processing time of up to 10 weeks.

Richard Thomson: It is quite remarkable, is it not, that six days on from an Opposition day debate where the Minister was asked that very question three times and failed to give a figure for the size of the passport backlog, he is still unable to give us an answer? I put it to him that perhaps the thing that would most cheer those who are languishing in that backlog—the one official piece of documentation that he could ensure is issued quickly—is his own ministerial P45.

Kevin Foster: As we saw last week, those who have nothing to offer by way of policy like to go personal. To help the hon. Member, the question was about the proportion of passport applications received. He got an answer to it, but his supplementary makes it clear that he has no ideas of his own to offer.

Deidre Brock: The Public and Commercial Services Union, which represents the staff at Her Majesty's Passport Office, has commented that the backlog is due to a number of issues including

“lack of staff, poor management and failures”

on the part of contractors. Rather than blaming staff or suggesting more privatisation, will the UK Government meet union representatives in order to learn what action is needed to ensure that the Passport Office is properly funded and staffed?

Kevin Foster: We are certainly grateful for the hard work that staff are putting in, and, as I said last week, it is a pity that we are seeing their efforts being rubbished for political ends. We have been recruiting more staff at the Passport Office and investing in the modernisation of processes, and we engage regularly with senior HMPO officials, as well as ensuring that union officials can have their say. We should bear in mind the current record output from the Passport Office, which is dealing with a surge of applications. I must say that it is striking to note the sudden interest expressed by Opposition Members who said very little about this last year.

Patricia Gibson: Civil servants working in the Passport Office are under huge pressure, and staff morale is reported to be understandably at an all-time low, owing to a lack of Government preparation for the up to 9 million passport applications or renewals expected following lockdown. Meanwhile, my constituents face intolerable delays and the prospect of missing much-needed holidays and family events. We have been promised repeatedly in this Chamber that things will improve, but the 10-week target continues to be too often missed. How much longer must we wait for passport offices to be fully staffed and resourced, so that my constituents are not subjected to yet another aspect of Backlog Britain?

Kevin Foster: Dearie me! In fact, we have been increasing the number of staff at the Passport Office rather than reducing it as the hon. Lady has implied. We have dealt with 3 million applications in three months, and soon we will have dealt with more in six months than we did in the whole of last year. It was fairly obvious that 5 million passports had not been renewed during the pandemic, and we started to plan for this last year. In April 2021, we changed and clarified the service standard and began preparations to deal with the surge. We hear these attacks from Opposition Members, but what we never hear from them is an idea.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): A month ago, a dozen passport cases a day were pinged into my office. That number has now fallen to just two or three a week, and my caseworker Zach and I are very grateful for the improvement that the Home Office has brought about. However, once those passports are handed over by the Home Office to the private delivery companies, can the Home Office do more to ensure that each one reaches the intended household rather than a random neighbour, a random bush or indeed a random river, which is where these passports seem to end up?

Kevin Foster: It is concerning to hear of those examples, because there are clear standards and procedures for how passports are delivered: they cannot, for example, just be left in a communal area. We have engaged DHL, which is normally our international agent for domestic deliveries, and have also used Royal Mail to return documents. However, I should be interested to hear some specific examples from my hon. Friend, and I am grateful for his comment that he and his caseworker have noticed improvements in recent weeks.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I know that the Minister has worked hard to reduce the backlog, and I am grateful to him for that, but, as I am sure he knows, there are still some issues. Can he tell us what proportion of Passport Office staff are back in the office, and, while he is at it, can he help me with the case of Wendy, who is still waiting for a passport? Her father died suddenly abroad, and in order to attend his funeral she needs to have her passport today. After the Minister has finished his duties in the House, would he mind helping me to chase up Wendy's case so that she can try to get to her father's funeral?

Kevin Foster: As we have said a couple of times before at the Dispatch Box, people involved in the passport operation have been back in the office for some time.

However, we are happy to expedite cases like that of my hon. Friend's constituent, when there are reasons for travel that are both compelling and compassionate. I am very sorry to hear of the bereavement that Wendy has suffered, and will be happy to look into how we can get the passport expedited for her.

Departmental Morale

9. **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What steps she is taking to help ensure good morale within her Department. [900583]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): Home Office staff can be proud of the work that they do to keep our country safe, but also proud of the large amount of operational work that we have just been discussing. The Home Office has launched a five-year plan to deliver an engaged, motivated and productive workforce, which will include new efficiencies, new technology, and ways of helping staff to improve their performance.

Mr Sheerman: That sounds very impressive until we come to my part of West Yorkshire, where I talk to the police, to probation officers, to prison staff and to firefighters. Their morale is at rock bottom. Whatever the Home Secretary is doing in the Department, will she for goodness' sake get out into the country and meet real people, who are depressed and demoralised by this Government's cutbacks?

Priti Patel: Can I politely say to the hon. Gentleman that getting out and about the country is not an issue for me? I meet police officers, fire workers, representatives from local councils and local authorities and all the partners we work with, and that cuts across the criminal justice system as well. I also do a great deal of work with victims and others to keep our country safe and deliver vital public services, and it is important that we respect them, support them, empower them and pay tribute to them. I would be very happy to come to the hon. Gentleman's patch and meet some of the people he has referred to.

Relocations to Rwanda

10. **Suzanne Webb** (Stourbridge) (Con): What progress her Department has made in relocating individuals to Rwanda under the migration and economic development partnership. [900584]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Tom Pursglove): As the House will be aware, despite the detailed deliberations and judgments received in various domestic courts that heard the case, the European Court of Human Rights' out-of-hours judge granted last-minute interim measures. The Government are seeking greater transparency from the ECHR on the reasons for its judgment. A full judicial review is expected to be heard in July. I want to be clear that this partnership is fully compliant with our international obligations.

Suzanne Webb: Unbelievably, £5 million a day is being spent on housing asylum seekers in hotels. That is money that my constituents would rather see invested in the west midlands—for example, supporting the 1,500 additional police officers that the Department has helped to recruit across the region. Can my hon. Friend confirm

that he will press ahead with our Rwanda partnership, to end our dependency on this expensive accommodation and crack down on the people smuggling gangs once and for all?

Tom Pursglove: My hon. Friend absolutely hits the nail on the head in explaining why our new plan for immigration is so important, and we are determined to deliver on it. It is a comprehensive package of reform, including the Rwanda proposals, and we are going to get on and deliver on it. The Prime Minister has said that we will work through these issues, and that is precisely what we are now doing.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the Scottish National party spokesperson, Stuart C. McDonald.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): On World Refugee Day, we pay tribute to all the fantastic refugees who have made utterly amazing contributions to our society and who were, thank goodness, able to have their claims heard here and rebuild their lives here instead of being dumped and offloaded thousands of miles away. The full hearing on whether the Home Secretary's policy in Rwanda is lawful will take place in July, as the Minister said. Surely, if the Home Secretary has an iota of respect for the UNHCR and the importance of the refugee convention, she will confirm that she will wait for the outcome of that hearing instead of gambling on another reckless, degrading and expensive attempt at these removals.

Tom Pursglove: The hon. Gentleman will recognise that we do not comment on ongoing legal proceedings. We have had this debate many times, but what I would say is that every day that this new partnership is not in operation is a day that people continue to risk their lives in the channel. That is not acceptable or sustainable, which is why we are taking the steps we are.

Domestic Abuse

11. **Aaron Bell** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): What progress her Department has made on tackling domestic abuse. [900585]

13. **Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland) (Con): What progress her Department has made on tackling domestic abuse. [900587]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Rachel Maclean): This Government are committed to tackling violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse, and that is why we introduced the landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021. In March this year we published our tackling domestic abuse plan, backed by more than £230 million of funding, including £75 million for tackling perpetrators and multi-year funding for interventions and support. The plan also includes expanding the roll-out of Domestic Abuse Matters training for police officers and, importantly, projects to protect children.

Aaron Bell: I welcome the tackling domestic abuse plan, which focuses on the perpetrators of a disgusting and destructive crime. Can I also stress the need for prevention and particularly for educating the next generation

of children in schools about the importance of healthy relationships so that we do not continue to see this in the future? Can the Minister confirm that that is included in the plan as well?

Rachel Maclean: My hon. Friend is right that prevention is the first pillar of our plan. We have set out how we are tackling perpetrators with specific programmes that are proven to prevent this disgusting crime from happening in the first place. It has to start very early, which is why relationships, sex and health education is now a statutory part of the curriculum so that children are taught the importance of respectful relationships.

Jerome Mayhew: Reports of domestic abuse now account for 24% of all calls to Norfolk police. Is the criminal justice system the right route for all these calls? If not, will the Minister set out how more appropriate steps can be taken to free up police time?

Rachel Maclean: My hon. Friend raises an important point. As I said in my previous answer, tackling perpetrators is a vital part of our work, but our response goes wider than just the criminal justice system. That is why we are funding perpetrator interventions that reach out to tackle some of these unhealthy behaviours at source. We are investing more than £75 million over three years to achieve that end.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the shadow Minister, Jess Phillips.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): In July 2021, the Government announced that a domestic homicide sentencing review will look at unfairness in the sentencing of intimate partner domestic homicides. According to Counting Dead Women, at least 105 women have since been killed. The family and friends of these women face immeasurable pain from their loss, so where is the domestic homicide sentencing review, which is now six months late? For the sake of the women who will definitely be murdered next week, may I ask why there is such a delay?

Rachel Maclean: The hon. Lady will know from our many debates in the House on this issue that we set out our holistic response to domestic abuse in the domestic abuse plan. If she looks at that, she will see all the work we are doing on the domestic homicide review. This matter crosses a number of Departments, and I am happy to write to her on the specific issue, but we are bearing down on people who murder their partners. That is why we introduced the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, why we are reforming the entire system and why we are putting multimillion pounds-worth of funding into tackling perpetrators, as I said to my hon. Friends the Members for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell) and for Broadland (Jerome Mayhew).

Topical Questions

T1. [900599] **Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab):** If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): We do not make policy by mob rule in this country. The Public Order Bill will enable us to overcome

the guerrilla tactics that bring misery to the hard-working public, disrupt businesses, interfere with the emergency services, cost taxpayers billions and put lives at risk.

The Public Order Bill will also stop protesters targeting major transport projects and infrastructure, and it will introduce new criminal offences of locking on and going equipped to lock on. It will also extend the police's stop and search powers to allow them to search and seize articles related to protest-related offences, and it will introduce serious disruption prevention disorders and a new preventive court order that targets protesters who are determined to inflict repeated disruption on the public. Breaching these orders will be a criminal offence.

This Government are committed to being on the side of ordinary working people. It is a shame that the Labour party continues not to support such measures.

Rachel Hopkins: My Luton South constituents are deeply frustrated at the Home Office's huge backlogs. My office is currently waiting for responses from the Home Office on 35 passport cases, 21 asylum cases, and 45 visa cases, with visa applications going back to the start of the year. With a proposal to cut the number of civil servants by 20% on the horizon, how will the Secretary of State fix the mess that her Government have created?

Priti Patel: The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) has just spoken about passports and the number of staff who have been recruited, contrary to the hon. Lady's comments. She will recognise that, when it comes to visas, the Government prioritised the Ukrainian visa scheme above other visas and, of course, it has now been switched over to ensure that all applications are processed in good time.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): New analysis today shows that in half of communities no burglaries have been solved in three years. Meanwhile, the proportion of all crimes reaching court has plummeted to 5.8%. Why is this Home Secretary letting so many more criminals off?

Priti Patel: Let me respond directly to the right hon. Lady. First, the reports today on burglary statistics are deeply troubling. Working with the National Police Chiefs' Council, we are effectively getting more detailed information, force by force, but I would like to remind her that burglary is down by 24%, neighbourhood crime is down by 33% and vehicle offences are down by 28%. With that, it is worth highlighting—in fact, I would like to thank—some of the outstanding Conservative police and crime commissioners such as those for Bedfordshire and for Nottinghamshire, for example, who have effectively pledged and had specific operations to target burglary within their regions.

Yvette Cooper: I am glad that burglaries fell in lockdown but they are now going back up, and overall crime is 18% higher and prosecutions are 18% lower on this Home Secretary's watch. This is the first time in 25 years that any Home Secretary has presided over both such a

big rise in crime and a big drop in the charge rate. So how does it feel to be responsible for the weakest Government performance on crime in a quarter of a century?

Priti Patel: For the education and information of the right hon. Lady, may I restate to the House that burglary is down by 24%, neighbourhood crime is down by 33% and vehicle offences are down by 28%? *[Interruption.]* I appreciate that she does not want to hear the facts and that she struggles with listening to facts and grappling with factual information and data. This is why the Government's beating crime plan will go even further, so that, force by force, the Government can absolutely ensure that every single police force is held to account, which the Labour party should welcome, along with many of the resources that this Government have put into beating crime.

T2. [900600] **Robbie Moore** (Keighley) (Con): I know that in the past few weeks there have been significant improvements in dealing with passport applications, but I am still dealing with a few outstanding cases where constituents are waiting beyond the 10-week period, so will the Minister provide further reassurance to me and to my constituents that we will be able to deal with their cases and get them completed as soon as possible?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): We have already recruited another 650 staff and are in the process of recruiting another 550. Obviously, where people have been waiting over 10 weeks and have travel booked, we will look to expedite their application for free.

T5. [900604] **Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): We should all be concerned about the length of time and the frequency with which minors are detained in police cells. Cells are made for adults, yet minors are being detained in them for as long as adults and data shows that the average time spent in police custody is increasing. That is despite legislation saying that minors should be detained only for the shortest appropriate period. What are the Government doing and how do they plan to re-address that?

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): In the past few years, we have been working closely with the police across the whole of the UK to drive down the number of minors held in custody and the duration of that. As the hon. Lady will know, the appropriate adult scheme is in place to make sure that minors who are detained are accompanied by adults who, as I say, are appropriate. If she has specific cases she wants to raise with me, I would be more than happy to look at them, but thus far the trend has been improving.

T3. [900601] **Anna Firth** (Southend West) (Con): Last week, I was delighted to hear the Home Secretary recognise the national success of Southend police's Operation Grip and call for it to be rolled out around the country. Does she agree that Southend police's Operation Union, which adopts an events mindset to policing our seafront, should also be rolled out nationally, especially to coastal areas?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend is right on the national Grip funding roll-out, which originated from a visit I made to Southend two years ago, where I was so impressed by the data-driven hotspot work that we managed to get the money out of the Treasury to spread it further. I certainly look forward to seeing the results of Operation Union. If it is equally successful, I do not see why we would not roll that out too.

T9. [900608] **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is quite ironic that while we have been in the Chamber we have received an email to say that the Home Office MP inquiry line has collapsed because of heavy use. I am quite tempted to run through my 200 outstanding cases that are waiting for answers from the Home Office; instead, perhaps a Minister could confirm to me that Zill-e Huma, who is waiting for a spousal visa for her husband, will get that processed before her baby is born at the end of July.

Kevin Foster: I am happy to take the details of that individual case from the hon. Member. We are aware of an issue with the MPs' hotline this morning; the hub and email are unaffected. Home Office Digital, Data and Technology is currently working on a solution and we expect the issue to be resolved shortly.

T4. [900602] **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): When we delivered Brexit, we made a promise to take back control of our borders. That was about not just ending freedom of movement but cracking down on small boat crossings of the channel. The Secretary of State and her team have done an awful lot of work to try to clamp down on such crossings. Does she agree that our partnership with Rwanda is critical to breaking the economic model of the people-smuggling gangs? Will she confirm that the Department will do everything it can to get the scheme moving?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Tom Pursglove): My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are introducing whole-system reform in the new plan for immigration, and we have the partnership with Rwanda and are readily signing new returns agreements. Of course, we are seeing greater international co-operation, including with the French—for example, 50% of crossings are not originating in the first place. That is important progress. We are continuing to work round the clock on the issue and my hon. Friend can be assured that we will continue to do so.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): This week, musicians from the Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra are applying for visas to the UK to perform here next month, but there are real concerns about delays in their getting the visas and about the £18,000 that it will cost the musicians—funds they just do not have in time of war. Every other European Government have waived complex visa requirements for the musicians to perform in their country. I have asked the Prime Minister about this and written to the Home Secretary about it twice. Will the Home Secretary agree today to look at expediting the visa process and waiving the fees, so that Ukrainian musicians can come to the UK to perform?

Kevin Foster: I am happy to meet the hon. Member to discuss this matter. As other colleagues will know, I have already dealt with a number of groups in relation to Ukraine, and there are exceptional circumstances in which the process may need to be expedited.

T6. [900605] **Antony Higginbotham** (Burnley) (Con): In the past few weeks, not a day has gone by on which my team and I have not helped a constituent with a passport issue. Although most of the issues have been resolved, it should not take the intervention of someone's Member of Parliament for them to get their passport. Will the Home Office consider bringing back the old British visitor's passport, which was issued by post offices for a 12-month period, to help to reduce the backlog?

Kevin Foster: A lot of work is being done to catch up on passports. I think it is safe to say that to go back to a system that was fundamentally paper-based would bring quite a range of security issues, not least at the border—that is why it was discontinued. I assure my hon. Friend that a wide range of work is being done and, as I have said, we are still doing roughly 98.5% of passports within the advertised 10-week service time.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I was pleased to see that the Home Office finally published details of the remaining pathways for the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme, but just hours later the Ministry of Defence revealed that around 10,000 people—many of whom are at risk because they stepped forward to serve when we asked them to do so—were still left behind but eligible for the Afghan relocations and assistance policy scheme. What additional capacity is going to be put into the Department, both to clear the backlog of outstanding applications and to process thousands of new ones?

Kevin Foster: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns. To be clear, the MOD processes ARAP applications and deals with eligibility. Given our expertise in that area, we are certainly happy to offer what support and assistance we can from UK Visas and Immigration to help to get applications through, because like the hon. Gentleman we do not want to see stuck in Afghanistan people who bravely stood alongside our forces.

T7. [900606] **Suzanne Webb** (Stourbridge) (Con): British people have voted consistently for controlled immigration and the right to secure borders. Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that we have heard absolutely no practical solutions from the Labour party to combat the problems of illegal immigration?

Tom Pursglove: It is fair to say that the plan we are advancing is the only credible plan to address the issue. It is comprehensive and will end the dangerous channel crossings, preserve life, get illegal migration back under control and, of course, bring sustainability to the related finances.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): My constituent faces losing her job with the NHS and is unable to visit a seriously ill close relative abroad because the Home Office has failed to deal with her visa, which was requested last year. I have raised this four times with the Home Office urgent inquiry line and have received no

response for two months. Will the Minister look at this particular case, which I wrote to the Home Secretary about last week, and, more generally, at the service, or lack of service, that the urgent inquiry line is providing to MPs?

Kevin Foster: I am very happy to look into the individual case.

T8. [900607] **Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): After repeated calls to the Labour South Yorkshire police and crime commissioner to reopen police stations in our towns and villages, he has reopened the station at Edlington, with a population of 8,000. I have been leading a campaign for the return of a police station to Dinnington, with a population of 13,000. Does my right hon. Friend agree that a town of that size must have a police station and that the commissioner should reopen the premises in Dinnington without delay?

Kit Malthouse: As usual, Mr Speaker, it is no surprise to hear my hon. Friend standing up for his constituents and fighting for their interests. He is right to look for greater police presence in his constituency, and when we finish recruiting 20,000 police officers, we will need somewhere for them to put all their stuff. Having that somewhere in his constituency would make sense.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): A total of 5,279 children were strip searched by the Metropolitan police between 2019 and 2021, 75% of whom were from a black, Asian and minority ethnic background. This data covers only children who were strip searched after an arrest, which means that the number of children strip searched among those not arrested will be even higher, such as in the case of Child Q who was never actually arrested. The Home Office will require police forces to provide this data on strip searches only on a voluntary basis. Can the Home Secretary say why she will not commit to making it mandatory for police forces to produce this data?

Kit Malthouse: Although the case of Child Q was deeply regrettable and the Metropolitan police have offered their apologies in that case, I am sure that the hon. Lady will accept that, sadly, there are circumstances where these kind of searches of all manner of people are warranted. She raises a good point about transparency, and I know that all police chiefs across the country have it at the forefront of their minds that their legitimacy is built on public confidence about what they do and I will certainly explore the idea that she suggests.

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): Neighbourhood crime and antisocial behaviour is better tackled with the police visibility and responsiveness that a town centre police station can provide. Will my right hon. Friend give his support and encouragement to efforts by north Wales police to reopen a police station in the centre of Prestatyn, possibly at the redeveloped old library site?

Kit Malthouse: I am more than happy to support my hon. Friend in seeking the best for his constituents, as I did on Friday in Tiverton where the front counter of the police station is due to open in November. I hope and believe that his constituents will benefit from the significant uplift in capacity and funding that we are giving to police forces, which will allow them to do exactly as he asks.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): When the Joint Committee on Human Rights visited Strasbourg last week, we were told that the United Kingdom sends fewer cases to the European Court of Human Rights per capita than any other signatory state. We were also told that UK Government Ministers have repeatedly given the Council of Europe assurances that Britain will not withdraw from the convention. Will the Home Secretary withdraw the rather intemperate remarks that she made as reported at the weekend because she was displeased by the Court's decision to temporarily halt the flights to Rwanda last week?

Priti Patel: In light of the hon. and learned Lady's comments, it is important to put it on record that Britain upholds international standards and all aspects of the law. Our policies are proving that is the case when it comes to illegal migration, as demonstrated by the domestic courts. As I said have repeatedly, I will not comment on ongoing legal cases.

Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con): On 3 May, a convoy of vehicles left Blyth Valley heading for the Polish border with a fire appliance, a support vehicle and a 4x4. The staff of West Hartford fire station volunteered to drive almost 2,000 miles to help the people of Ukraine, leaving their families and loved ones behind. Does my right hon. Friend agree that local fire and rescue teams can play an important role in bringing communities together? With that in mind, will she please visit Blyth Valley so that we can show her these amazing teams and everything we have done?

Priti Patel: I would be delighted to come and support my hon. Friend in Blyth Valley, but there is a serious point here: over recent months, the fire and rescue service across the entire country has come together in such a compassionate way to provide essential kit and equipment to help the people of Ukraine, and I am pleased that his constituency has done that.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The unprecedented cuts to North Yorkshire fire & rescue service will result in longer response times in York, Scarborough and Harrogate. Will the Secretary of State meet me, the police and crime commissioner and the Fire Brigades Union to talk about those cuts and how we can ensure that fair funding goes to our fire services?

Priti Patel: I would be very happy to meet the hon. Lady. Having previously discussed this in North Yorkshire, on a visit that took place last year, I have seen the incredible integrated working across police and fire in North Yorkshire and the exceptional service they provide to her constituency and across the county, particularly in the remote and rural areas. However, as I say, I would be happy to have a conversation with her.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): Now then, when we had a Labour police and crime commissioner and a Labour MP in Ashfield, the only thing they ever did of any note was to close our local police station. Since we have had a sensible Conservative MP in Ashfield, we have two new Operation Reacher teams, safer streets funding for the New Cross area and more bobbies on the beat, but will the Home Secretary please back our latest bid to the safer streets fund for the forgotten town of Eastwood?

Priti Patel: I am very conscious of the great support in my hon. Friend's constituency—in fact, I have visited it a couple of times now and seen not only the police officers on the front line, but the way the community is coming together on safer streets. I have absolutely heard his request for this particular bid.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): The school holidays in Wales and England start on 22 July. There are nearly 30 million visits abroad by air in quarter 3, which includes those school holidays. To help families get away, will the Passport Office backlog be cleared by 22 July?

Kevin Foster: We have already made clear the actions we are taking. Since April last year we have been advising people to allow up to 10 weeks for an application, although 91% of people get their passport back within six weeks of applying. The hon. Member will also be aware that in some instances, such as school trips, collective passports can be used, subject to those being accepted by the country they are travelling to.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): Earlier in the year, Parliament repealed the antiquated Vagrancy Act 1824. It was an important step in our journey to ending homelessness for good. Imagine my surprise when I reviewed the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill to see that that repeal was repealed and that the Secretary of State will be given unlimited and unspecified powers to recriminalise homelessness. I know my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary cares about this, and she has been superb in supporting me and other Ministers in this mission. May I ask her to deal with this and ensure that we can get on with the job of ending homelessness?

Priti Patel: Absolutely. I pay tribute to and thank my right hon. Friend for all his support and work in this particular area. I will reach out and speak to him and we will join up on this.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Residents in Osterley contacted me last week. They have been suffering for months from antisocial behaviour, drug dealing and assaults, which came to a head last week. Councillors and local police have been working together to try to tackle the issue, but their efforts are hamstrung because there just are not enough police officers to do regular patrols in hotspots. Does the Home Secretary regret the 10 years of police cuts that leave my constituents and many others feeling unprotected?

Kit Malthouse: I am quite surprised to hear that given that I believe the hon. Lady is a London MP and the Metropolitan Police currently have more police officers on their roster than they have ever had in their history.

Jill Mortimer (Hartlepool) (Con): My team and I have been fighting for many hours to get a visa for a little Ukrainian girl, Alisa. She has been classified as an unaccompanied minor, although her aunt Viktoria provided evidence that she is her legal guardian many weeks ago. The situation is now grave as the family's 90-day Polish visa is about to expire and they will have to return to the war zone. That is unacceptable. I know that an unaccompanied minors policy was finally agreed last week, but I fear that a failure to process these applications

swiftly enough will soon lead to a humanitarian emergency for this family and others like them. Can my right hon. Friend please tell me what can be done to resolve this case and finally bring this family to safety in Hartlepool?

Priti Patel: I know that the Minister has been following up this case, so I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising it. I have already said in response to earlier questions that the policy on this is changing, but she has asked a specific question and I will address it.

Ukraine: UK and NATO Military Commitment

3.40 pm

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Minister to make a statement on the UK's and NATO's military commitment to Ukraine.

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty): Russia's assault on Ukraine is an unprovoked, premeditated attack against a sovereign democratic state that threatens global security. As set out to the House previously, the United Kingdom and NATO stand with Ukraine. We are providing political and practical support to support its self-defence, and will further strengthen NATO's deterrence and defence posture. Individual NATO allies, led by the UK, are also supporting Ukraine with lethal aid to ensure that Ukraine wins.

The United Kingdom was the first country to provide lethal aid, and we have increased our military and aid support, bringing the total budget to £1.3 billion. To date, we have sent over 6,900 anti-tank missiles; five air defence systems, including Starstreak anti-air missiles; 120 armoured fighting vehicles, including a small number of Stormers; 1,360 anti-structure munitions; 4.5 tonnes of plastic explosives; and 400,000 rounds of small-arms munitions. In addition, we have supplied over 200,000 items of non-lethal aid, including more than 82,000 helmets; more than 8,000 body armour kits; range finders; and medical equipment. As announced on 6 June 2022, we are providing cutting edge multiple-launch rocket systems, which can strike targets up to 80 kilometres away with pinpoint accuracy, offering a significant boost in capability to the Ukrainian armed forces. On 17 June, the Prime Minister offered to launch a major training operation for Ukrainian forces, with the potential to train up to 10,000 soldiers every three months—120 days.

We are currently supplying significant air power to NATO, including increased air patrols, with both Typhoons and F-35s for NATO air policing. We have also deployed four additional Typhoons to Cyprus to patrol NATO's eastern border. That means that we now have a full squadron of Royal Air Force fighter jets in southern Europe, ready to support NATO tasking. The United Kingdom has contributed more troops than any other ally to NATO's enhanced forward presence. UK troops will also be deploying a company-sized sub-unit to Bulgaria to work bilaterally alongside our Bulgarian counterparts for up to six months, enhancing interoperability. The PM will meet NATO leaders again for next week's Madrid summit, where NATO will agree the new strategic concept to set the direction of the alliance for the next decade and will agree long-term improvements to our deterrence and defence posture in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The United Kingdom's commitment to the alliance and European security is unconditional and enduring. Our commitment to article 5 of the Washington treaty is iron clad. We stand ready to defend our allies.

Mr Ellwood: First, may I thank you, Mr Speaker, for the flag-raising ceremony that you hosted today to mark Armed Forces Week?

The Prime Minister was right to visit Ukraine last week. The UK has been an exemplar in our support to that country compared with many of our NATO allies. But Russia is not losing and Ukraine is not winning. The Prime Minister said, "Prepare for a long war", and the new head of the British Army seeks to reconfigure our land forces to potentially face Russia on the battlefield. This all starkly illustrates that long-term European security is threatened not just by the utility of force but a wider conflict between the west and growing authoritarianism.

However, future generations may ask of NATO, "Why did you not put that fire out in Ukraine when you could have?"—by securing the port of Odesa, for example, rather than instead allowing Putin to claim a win and take his fight elsewhere. The penny is dropping in this regard. If we now recognise that our world is becoming more dangerous, Britain should lead a coalition of the willing that offers Ukraine the scale of support that it requires. Recognising this new picture requires us to review our own defence posture. We can certainly be proud of what Britain has done in upgrading its battle presence in the Baltics, leading the way in training Ukrainians and providing lethal weapons systems, but I say to the Minister that the tempo of these duties is unsustainable. We are overloading our troops with those widening commitments and we are not replenishing our defence stocks fast enough. All three services are now too small to manage the ever-greater burden that we are going to place on them. The cuts set out in the 2021 integrated review to personnel and military equipment must now be reversed.

Does the Minister agree that once again, Britain finds itself leading other European allies in spelling out the scale of the threat that the continent now faces, and stepping forward when other nations hesitate to confront that threat? We cannot do that on a peacetime defence budget of 2.2%; it is time to upgrade our defence posture and spending to 3% if we are serious about preventing the spread of conflict in Europe.

Leo Docherty: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to some of my right hon. Friend's points. He said that Russia is not losing in Ukraine, with which I would take issue. I think that Russia is losing and that it was losing from the point of invasion. Its catastrophic losses in the west of the country and the way that it has had to refocus in the east describe that strategic loss, so I disagree with him on that.

Our domestic response will always be threat-based. My right hon. Friend made some remarks about whether NATO forces should have been deployed to Ukraine in anticipation of the Russian invasion. Our judgment is—and collectively, everyone would judge—that we got the balance right between providing reassurance and effect, while avoiding the direct conflict that would have resulted immediately from putting NATO forces directly into Ukraine.

As I said, we are a threat-based organisation. In making the argument for defence expenditure, we need to understand that there are three basic points of context that I ask my right hon. Friend to take note of. First, we do everything as part of the NATO alliance. We are one of a 30-member defensive alliance—soon to be 32—and because of that, we are a great deal stronger than we are separately. One of the significant lessons for the Russian

[Leo Docherty]

military machine is how exposed it is by being alone. We are stronger as an alliance; as an alliance, we massively outnumber any kind of effect the Russians can bring to bear.

Secondly, it is important to recognise that we acknowledged the significant threat posed by Russia as part of our defence Command Paper, which came out of the integrated review and was released in March 2021; many right hon. and hon. Members will have read it. Page 5, paragraph 1.4 leads with the fact that

“Russia continues to pose the greatest nuclear, conventional military and sub-threshold threat to European security.”

In terms of our doctrine and our response, that is not new to UK national defence. That is a really important contextual thing to understand.

Thirdly, that is why we are making good use of the £24-billion uplift that we have had under this Government, which is driving forward the agility, deployability and lethality that we need in the new global context. Manifold lessons will be drawn from the outrageous Russian invasion of Ukraine, including the vulnerability of armour and of large bodies of troops; the potency of technology and remote fires; and the urgent importance of having a fully modernised military with match-fit technology. That is what the integrated review and the defence Command Paper do.

We have more money than we have ever had—£24 billion more than we would have had otherwise. We will always keep things under review, but we should be confident that doctrinally and militarily, in terms of kit and equipment, we are on the right lines.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the shadow Secretary of State.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): Today marks day 117 since Russia began its brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine. It is now a grim, grinding war of attrition. NATO’s Secretary-General warned last week that the alliance

“must prepare for the fact that it could take years.”

Everything that can be done must be done to help to maintain the Ukrainian military’s morale, weaponry and personnel. The Government will continue to have Labour’s full support in the military assistance they provide to Ukraine.

In April, when responding to the Defence Secretary’s statement in this House, I urged the Government to move to supply

“the new NATO weapons that Ukraine will need for Putin’s next offensive”.—[*Official Report*, 25 April 2022; Vol. 712, c. 463.]

In these last two months, what NATO-standard stock has been supplied from the UK to Ukraine, and how many new contracts for missiles or ammunition production have the MOD now managed to sign and start?

On Friday, as the Minister said, the Prime Minister offered to train 10,000 new Ukrainian soldiers every three months. This is exactly what is needed. Did President Zelensky accept Britain’s offer? Will these Ukrainian recruits be trained in Britain? Which other NATO nations will be involved in such training?

As we mark the start of Armed Forces Week, the Labour leader and I had the privilege of visiting NATO’s maritime command and our UK Permanent Joint Headquarters in Northwood this morning. We wanted to thank our personnel for the service they give to our national and NATO commitments. However, there are serious growing concerns about the UK meeting its NATO commitments, with the failure to reboot defence plans in response to Ukraine, delays to a fully modern warfighting division until 2030, continued uncertainty over Ajax and, of course, further deep cuts to Army numbers.

The new head of the Army said in an internal message to troops last week that

“there is now a burning imperative to forge an Army capable of fighting alongside our allies and defeating Russia in battle”,

so why are Ministers pushing ahead with plans to cut another 10,000 soldiers? When will they halt these cuts, and when will they start to rebuild the strength of the British Army to meet the threats that our country and our NATO allies face?

Leo Docherty: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman’s questions and, as ever, we are grateful for the support of the Opposition for our Ukraine defence policy.

To go straight to the questions, new contracts are under discussion. The Minister for Defence Procurement and the Prime Minister had a meeting this morning, which was the latest in a series of discussions about escalating the supply of NATO-standard equipment, which is very important.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke about training, and that was a very significant result of the Prime Minister’s visit last week. I think the Defence Secretary also had some discussions. Not being privy to those discussions, it is not appropriate for me to speculate about their content at the Dispatch Box. However, I can say that the reference point for the UK’s contribution will be the remarkably successful Operation Orbital, which has trained some 25,000 Ukrainian soldiers since 2014. We have a long and deep heritage of working very closely and successfully with our Ukrainian allies, and I think that will be a very good basis on which to conduct future training support. As to which NATO allies may be involved, I cannot confirm that, but I would say that NATO, by disposition, tends to work in alliance, so I suspect other nations to be involved.

I am glad for the update about the right hon. Gentleman’s visit to PJHQ, but I would ask him to be a bit more optimistic about our absolute resolve to meet our commitments. This is about a disposition in which we are absolutely resolute to be agile and to strain every sinew to deliver at pace the technological and military revolution necessary to make ourselves more lethal, agile and deployable around the world than ever before. For too long, the measurement of our military capability has been about men and vehicles in garrisons, rather than our ability to project power, and that is something that we are absolutely confident we are getting right.

To prove the point, the fact the Chief of the General Staff is mentioning Russia demonstrates that, since March last year, this has been part of our job done. That is nothing new, and under the leadership that we are showing and with the determination for us to change

and embrace modern technology as part of our ability to deliver lethal effect, we are getting to a point where we are more match fit than ever before to counter Russian aggression.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): As the expenditure on all the equipment that we have rightly been supplying is operational, will the Minister confirm that it is coming from the Treasury reserve and not from the normal annual defence budget? I gently remind him and the House that, in the first half of the 1980s, we were spending not 2.3% or even 3% of GDP on defence; we were spending between 4.7% and 5.1% of GDP on defence.

Leo Docherty: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's question. The answer is yes. I note, with particular regard to the long-standing nature of his interest in the issue, his comments about overall defence spending.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): Given the evolution of the war in Ukraine, what lessons has the Ministry of Defence learned about the enduring need for infantry to take, hold and/or defend territory? Will those lessons be input to a refresh of MOD thinking and operational strategy that drove the much-derided 10,000 cut in Army numbers in the integrated review? Those infantry will require to be supported by heavy armour and armoured fighting vehicles, but, given that the UK's decade-old solution to the latter—Ajax—is an unfathomably challenged £5.5 billion project that is surely now on the brink of being cancelled, how has the war in Ukraine focused the Department's attention in that regard?

I recently returned from Türkiye, where the Turkish Defence Minister advised NATO parliamentarians on the role that his country is playing in seeking to facilitate safe passage of merchant vessels into and out of Ukraine with grain. What dynamic is the UK playing in that space? Does the Minister agree with the Turkish Minister's assessment that it is the Ukrainians who—understandably—need persuading of the merits of demining those shipping lanes and ensuring that they do not then fall prey to Russian naval forces? Finally, if agreement is reached on demining, what role will the world-leading mine countermeasure professionals in the Royal Navy, many of whom are based in Scotland, play in demining those approaches to Ukraine?

Leo Docherty: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's questions. The lessons are manifold. One in particular is the vulnerability of armour without significant covering fire and deep fires, and what happens when a combined arms manoeuvre falls apart, particularly due to a complete failure of the moral component. He is attempting to spin that into a lesson purely about numbers of infantry. I draw his attention to the necessity of infantry having protection, mobility and its own fire to protect itself. Anyone of my generation of people in the military will remember deploying unprotected vehicles without a significant ability to manoeuvre and bring on deep fires, especially in a remote way. Those capabilities—the ability for our infantry to be much better protected, more mobile and more lethal—are exactly what we are delivering with the integrated review and the defence Command Paper, and that is a job of work worth doing.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Ajax. The House will be interested to know that we are looking at it with urgent focus, and I am sure that the Minister for Defence Procurement will update the House in due course.

The hon. Gentleman made an interesting point about Turkey and the critical, strategic import of the Black sea with regard to grain exports out of Ukraine, with some 50% being stuck there. I will not speculate about the role of the magnificent Royal Navy or anyone else in the British military, but undoubtedly that will be on the agenda at the NATO summit in Madrid next week.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): The UK's military support for Ukraine has been world-leading, but it is legitimate for us to ask whether we are restocking adequately and quickly enough here in the UK. Will my hon. Friend update us on whether the promised military supplies coming from other European countries have materialised in Ukraine? It is essential that our rhetoric in NATO is matched with actions if we are to remain credible, as both what we say and what we do will be closely monitored in Moscow.

Leo Docherty: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's question. We are happily operating a new-for-old policy with regard to our own supplies. Further, on the rest of the alliance, there is a sense of great urgency. We are seeking to ensure that the multiple launch rocket system is delivered in good order as soon as possible, and the contribution of the US to that will also be critical. I think that the collective sense of urgency will increase as we come to the NATO summit in Madrid next week.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): I agree wholeheartedly with the Chair of the Defence Committee and the shadow Defence Secretary. Unless we are prepared to make a real investment in our Army and the weapons that are required, we cannot supply them to Ukraine. We are not supplying the long-term equipment required in order to attack the Russians coming in; what we are doing is holding back on supporting the Army, which is not good enough. When will we start to look at first of all supporting Poland with NATO to supply the big aircraft that are needed, and how can we move forward on that?

Leo Docherty: I would disagree entirely with that. The tactical weapon that we have supplied in the form of the NLAW has had a remarkable strategic output. The hon. Gentleman speculates about MiGs and so on, but I do not think that strictly relevant. What is important is the multiple launch rocket system, and it is also important that we respond to Ukraine demand and pay attention to the demand signal. We must follow what the Ukrainians themselves want.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I was proud to hear President Zelensky describe our support as strong and resolute, and Great Britain as being Ukraine's best friend. That is great stuff.

Does the Minister agree that three risks are associated with what is currently happening in Ukraine? The first is mission creep, which, as always, we must beware of; the second could be some kind of error, in which an American or Russian plane is shot down by mistake, possibly leading to some form of escalation; and the

[James Gray]

third would be a false-flag operation by the Russians, somehow using that as an excuse to try to drag NATO into the war. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must at all costs avoid NATO's direct involvement in the war? Support is great; war fighting is not.

Leo Docherty: I do, and that is a cogent analysis of the attendant risks to this: mission creep, some sort of error, and a false-flag operation. That is why throughout this we have based our response in a bilateral manner. We are clearly paying attention to what other NATO allies are doing, but it is a bilateral provision, which is right and proper. At all times, it has been entirely bespoke in response to what the Ukrainians themselves want, and we are particularly well placed to do that because of our long-term involvement and successful training of Ukrainian forces since 2014. That has led to a good basis and foundation of warm personal relationships across our two respective militaries, which has really borne fruit.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): Given that, as has already been mentioned, the new head of the Army said that the UK must

“forge an Army capable of fighting alongside our allies and defeating Russia in battle”,

I found the Minister's response to the Urgent Question a little complacent. Is he absolutely sure that that can be done, while continuing with the planned cuts of 10,000 to the Army? Many of us are not sure about that.

Leo Docherty: I am confident. A significant increase in money is delivering new capabilities to make our people more lethal, more agile, and more mobile. That body of work has been under way over the past couple of years, and was expressed in the Defence Command Paper published in March 2021. This is nothing new; we have been at this for a couple of years, and rightly so.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): I congratulate the Government on the significant matériel now being provided to Ukraine, but what is their current assessment about the possibility of Russia using tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine? Will the Minister confirm that plans are in place with our allies to deal with that in the horrific event of their use?

Leo Docherty: Of course we consider all scenarios in the Department. We still regard that as a very unlikely possibility, but the Ministry of Defence, like everyone else in defence, is always ready.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): We have all seen the appalling atrocities uncovered in Bucha and Irpin, and there is no doubt that they were perpetrated by Russian forces. Sixty people have also been killed in a school in Luhansk, following Russian shelling. Is it time for the Russian military units, including mercenary groups such as the Wagner Group, with its sinister death squads, to be proscribed as terrorist organisations?

Leo Docherty: The hon. Member makes a good point, and I agree with the sentiment. We sincerely hope—this is already happening—that these criminals, and they appear to be criminals in many cases, especially in regard

to the appalling atrocities being committed and the apparent murder of civilians in Bucha and elsewhere, will be brought before the International Criminal Court. It makes the point that Putin's invasion of Ukraine—that is how we must phrase it—has debased the entire Russian nation and its military. Those involved in it at every level must be held to account.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): What does my hon. Friend make of Putin's increasingly aggressive tone towards Lithuania in relation to the Kaliningrad enclave? Does he agree that one way to approach it would be to accelerate and expedite the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO? Will he do everything in his power to shore up our NATO ally to make sure that Putin's aggression is met with an appropriate response that will make sure he does nothing against that country, or the consequences will be very severe indeed?

Leo Docherty: I am grateful for that question, which shows that Putin is losing: his bluster is illustrative of his massive loss of confidence. He thought he was going to get less NATO because of this outrageous invasion, and he is getting more NATO. We very much look forward to Sweden and Finland, and their highly capable militaries, joining the alliance.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): This argument of more for less that we are hearing from the Government is what we have heard from them in virtually every area of public expenditure, whether it be the health service, social care or local government services, or the cutting of 21,000 police officers that we were told would not result in a rise in crime, but did. Is the Minister aware that the 10,000 planned cut in troops will result in the smallest Army we have had since 1714? Should the Government not review that in the light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

Leo Docherty: It is not more for less; it is doing more with more, because we have a £24 billion uplift. Defence expenditure is going up, and I hope the hon. Member appreciates that.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): The quantity of weaponry required by Ukraine vastly exceeds the amount pledged by NATO allies, and the amount pledged significantly exceeds the amount that has actually been delivered. To take the example that the Minister raised on MLRS, 300 of those systems are estimated to be required and 50 have been pledged, and the United Kingdom has delivered just three. What is our plan and that of our allies—particularly European ones, who simply do not have the stocks of these weapons—to boost production as quickly as possible?

Leo Docherty: My right hon. Friend should rest assured that every sinew is being strained. I think some of the time has been taken up in the necessary provisions—for example, the operatives need to be trained on target acquisition—so that the proper use of these kind of munitions can be made. This is a top priority, and I hope that the imperative and the fact that we have the NATO conference in Madrid next week will be another lever to expedite this.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): The Minister will be aware that people in my constituency hold great admiration for Thales, for the provision of next generation light anti-tank weapons and Starstreak and for the ability for Ukrainians to have the power to defend themselves. Further to that question, it is worthy of further examination. We are providing many platforms to Ukraine where reproduction simply is not possible and where a switch cannot be flicked immediately. Some of these systems have been decommissioned and are not in active production, so how does the Minister expect the House to have confidence in the assertion that what we give we will get back?

Leo Docherty: What we are doing is ensuring that commercial production is radically accelerated. The hon. Gentleman will know how complex and multifaceted that is. I am not pretending it is easy, but the full effort of the Department and our allies is resolutely focused on this issue.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for his statement and I praise the additional support we are offering Ukraine. As he said, NATO is the bedrock of our collective security and we have two new nations seeking to become members. I welcome the decisions of the Governments of Sweden and Finland to join, which are completely understandable now we have seen what Putin is capable of. Will my hon. Friend the Minister update the House on what support we will be giving Finland and Sweden as they seek to join the alliance?

Leo Docherty: That is a very good question. Those discussions are under way. My right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary visited both countries very recently to initiate those discussions. We have a heritage of quite active training and joint working in Scandinavia, particularly with regard to Norway. I will not speculate or pre-empt any announcement, but I think we will have a very significant schedule of work coming down the line.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): As we rightly focus on what is happening in Ukraine, Moldova rightly fears Russian advances along the southern coast of Ukraine, with a possible view to Russia annexing Transnistria in the same way as it annexed Crimea. Given that, what discussions is the Minister having with both Moldovan counterparts and NATO allies to ensure we are ready for that eventuality? How, given that we are likely to be in this for a very, very long time, is he building that coalition so it is stable going forward and we do not do what I suspect Putin wants us to do in the west—to blink, get bored and wander off? We cannot allow that to happen.

Leo Docherty: We will not allow that to happen. We are increasing our enhanced forward presence, which is very significant. We will be committing a company group into Bulgaria, in addition to our long-standing commitment to Estonia. Other allies will be positioning enhanced forward battalions in other eastern European countries, so collectively, as an alliance, we will be putting our money where our mouth is. That is really important.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is it not the truth that the Government have been caught out? Systematically, over 10 years, they have been running down our defence capacity. Ten years ago, I said there was a real danger in reducing our overall strength to fewer than 100,000 men and women. The fact of the matter is that we have to send a message to President Putin that we will invest in our defence and increase the number of people in our defence forces, and that we will, in future, take the defence of this country seriously.

Leo Docherty: We are doing that. We are investing in our defence. The overall defence budget has increased radically. It is £24 billion more than it was in 2019. The bottom line is lethality and improving our capability to deliver effect, not just simple numbers in a barracks. I urge the hon. Gentleman to read the defence Command Paper. He will find it instructive.

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): The British public are committed and willing to support the brave men and women of Ukraine who are fighting for their freedom. We must all remember how important it is that Ukraine wins. They are not just fighting for their freedom; they are fighting for a free world. This conflict may go on for months, or even years and years. It is important that the public are kept thoroughly informed, as their support is key to keeping Ukraine free. Will the Minister commit to ensure that that happens?

Leo Docherty: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. This is turning into a war of attrition. It will last as long as President Putin has the mistaken conviction that, by killing people in the Donbas region and occupying Ukrainian sovereign territory, he is somehow delivering a strategic victory for Russia. He is not. Ultimately, the Russian people, undermined by their leadership, will be the lever to ensure a different direction is taken.

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Since 2010, consecutive Conservative Governments have cut our Army by over a third, from over 102,000 to some 80,000, with further cuts planned. I absolutely despair at the Minister's set-piece answers about changing threats. In the very week when the head of the Army, Sir Patrick Sanders, said that we need to be "ready to fight and win wars on land"

and the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), the Chair of the Defence Committee, who speaks with deep knowledge of the subject, says that the armed forces are overstretched, will the Minister now commit to rethink, forget the set-piece answers, and actually consider what numbers we need in our armed forces going forward?

Leo Docherty: We have considered what we need. We have more money than ever before, with an additional £24 billion, which is delivering a more lethal, better protected, more mobile and readier military. It is in the defence Command Paper; we have been at this for a couple of years. The Chief of the General Staff's remarks are in accordance with that—he agrees with the plan, of course, because he is the head of the Army. It is not about simplistic measurements of numbers of people,

[*Leo Docherty*]

but about effect. At long last, we are embracing technology to give our people the most lethal capability, which is what they need.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): As we have heard, both Sweden and Finland have made an application to join NATO, but Turkey has said that it may consider delaying those applications for up to a year if its demands are not met. Does the Minister agree that such a response from Turkey in this context is totally unacceptable?

Leo Docherty: We acknowledge Turkey's concerns. Work on the matter is led by the Foreign Secretary and others, and I am sure that it will be on the agenda next week in Madrid. My expectation is that those concerns will be resolved in the interests of the alliance as a whole.

Mr Speaker: I call the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis). May I thank him for doing the reading this morning?

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): It was my pleasure, Mr Speaker.

Members across the House will have seen the recent assessment by the incoming Chief of the General Staff:

“There is now a burning imperative to forge an army capable of fighting alongside our allies and defeating Russia in battle.”

With those words in mind, and further to the letter that the Secretary of State sent to the Chancellor back in March, is the Minister—who I know thinks about these things very carefully—absolutely certain that there is not a requirement to go back to the Treasury and secure additional resource to ensure that our armed forces are properly prepared and have the capabilities they need to respond to the threats that undoubtedly exist?

Leo Docherty: We always keep these matters under review, but what we have at the moment is a good plan to deliver a great deal of new and very effective capability for the spend that we have. I will not speculate beyond that.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Russia has reportedly become China's biggest oil supplier, following sanctions in the face of the conflict in Ukraine. Can the Minister set out what level of risk is posed by strengthening ties and co-dependency between China and Russia in the immediate and longer term?

Leo Docherty: That is an interesting question. Clearly the dividend for China in the immediate term is a great deal of much cheaper energy, and I am sure that it will reap the benefit. In the longer term, however, the lesson for China is the willingness of western European nations, together with the US, to stand up for the integrity of sovereign nations. That is something that will not be lost on the Chinese.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Our efforts thus far for the United Kingdom to be a full and comprehensive supporter of Ukraine have been numerous; I appreciate the decisions that have been made. The longer Ukraine fights, however, the more soldiers and equipment it will lose against Russia, which is much larger and better resourced. Has the time now come for us to step forward and do much more with our NATO allies, particularly with Starstreak missiles?

Leo Docherty: That is a very pertinent question. We are doing much more. The recipe for success is much more energy towards capacity building for the Ukrainians, which is why we are now in active discussions about delivering training to the Ukrainian army. It is a war of attrition, but we must not make the mistake of thinking that it is not bleeding Russian capabilities very badly indeed. The Russian military will try to keep it up for a very long time, but we must not think that this is not hurting them very badly indeed.

Industrial Action on the Railway

4.19 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the rail strikes. We are now less than eight hours away from the biggest railway strike since 1989—a strike orchestrated by some of the best paid union barons, representing some of the better paid workers in this country, which will cause misery and chaos to millions of commuters.

This weekend, we have seen union leaders use all the tricks in the book to confuse, to obfuscate and to mislead the public. Not only do they wish to drag the railway back to the 1970s, but they are employing the tactics of bygone unions: deflecting accountability for their strikes on to others; attempting to shift the blame for their action, which will cause disruption and damage to millions of people; and claiming that others are somehow preventing an agreement to their negotiation.

I do not think the public will be hoodwinked. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members laugh, but we are talking about the families who will be unable to visit their relations, the music fans who are hoping to go to Glastonbury, the students who will be unable to get to their GCSEs and A-level exams, the businesses who are just beginning to recover from covid and people who will miss out on their medical treatment because of these strikes. That is what the Opposition are supporting. They know that this week's rail strikes, created and organised by the unions, are the full responsibility of the unions.

Of course, we are all doing our utmost to get the unions and the rail industry to agree a way forward and call off the strikes. In such discussions, it is always the employer and the unions who need to get together and negotiate. In this case, that is the train operating companies, Network Rail and their union representatives. We are not the employer, and we will not undermine the process. *[Interruption.]* I hear the calls of the Labour leadership for us to get involved somehow, perhaps by inviting the unions for beer and sandwiches to discuss the situation. We all know that the Leader of the Opposition thinks that a beer and a curry is a work meeting, but we will be leaving this to the employers, who are the right people to negotiate with the unions. Indeed, the unions are in daily talks with the employers—or at least they were, until they walked out an hour ago to hold a press conference, saying that the strikes would be on.

Despite these strikes, we are doing everything we can to minimise disruption throughout the entire network. We are working with the civil contingencies secretariat, the Government's emergency planning team, to keep critical supply chains open wherever possible. Operators will keep as many passenger trains as possible running, although of course with so much disruption to the timetable, that will be very difficult on strike days. It is estimated that around 20% of planned services will operate, focused on key workers, main population centres and critical freight routes. But there will be mass disruption, and we advise passengers to avoid travelling unless absolutely necessary—which, of course, for many it will be. The National Rail Enquiries website will be kept updated with the latest travel information to ensure that passengers can make informed decisions about their travel. Passengers are strongly advised to check before

they travel and encouraged to look for alternative means of transportation if their journey is affected, including on the days between the strikes.

We are looking at a variety of different options for the railways to maintain services amid disruption in the medium and longer term. We can no longer tolerate a position where rail workers can exercise their right to strike without any regard for how the rights of others are affected. Nurses, teachers and other working people who rely on the railway must be able to travel. Minimum service legislation is just one part of that. Minimum service levels are a Government manifesto commitment, and they will require train operators to run a base number of services even in the event of future strike action. It is a system that works well in other countries, including Belgium and France, and so we will be bringing in legislation to protect the travelling public if agreement cannot be reached when major disruption is expected, as with the strikes this week.

The rhetoric that we have heard from union leaders and Opposition Members over the weekend seems to be focused on widening the division rather than bridging the gap. The whole point of the railway reforms—based on the Williams review, which engaged with the unions very extensively—is to unite and modernise the industry, and just as we cannot reform the railways with obsolete technology, we cannot do so by clinging to obsolete working practices. For example, leisure travel at weekends is currently a huge potential growth area. After covid, people are coming back and are travelling at the weekends more than before. However, under an agreement which dates back to 1919, Sunday working is voluntary on most of the railway, so the industry cannot do what everyone else does—what other businesses and organisations do—and service its customers. Instead, it has to appeal to people to come and work, and that service has sometimes been unavailable, for instance when large football matches are taking place: during the Euro finals, 170 trains were cancelled.

The industry therefore needs to change. Unions claim that this strike is about a pay freeze, but that is factually incorrect. We are not imposing a pay freeze. The whole point of these reforms is to build a sustainable, growing railway, where every rail worker receives a decent annual pay rise. Let me be clear, however: if modernisation and reform are to work, we must have unions that are prepared to modernise, otherwise there can be no deal. This strike is not about pay, but about outdated unions opposing progress—progress that will secure the railway's future. These strikes are not only a bid to stop reform; they are critical to the network's future. If the reforms are not carried out, the strikes will threaten the very jobs of the people who are striking, because they will not allow the railway to operate properly and attract customers back.

The railway is in a fight. It is in a fight for its life, not just competing with other forms of public and private transport but competing with Teams, Zoom and other forms of remote working. Today, many commuters who three years ago had no alternative but to travel by train have other options, including the option of not travelling at all. Rail has lost a fifth of its passengers and a fifth of its revenue.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Government have committed £16 billion of emergency taxpayer support—we all know the numbers; that means £600 for every single household in the country—so that not a single

[Grant Shapps]

rail worker lost his or her job. We have invested £16 billion to keep trains running and ensure that no one at Network Rail or DfT-contracted train operating companies was furloughed. Now, as we recover and people start to travel again, the industry needs to grow its revenues. It needs to attract passengers back, and make the reforms that are necessary for it to compete. The very last thing that it should be doing now is alienating passengers and freight customers with a long and damaging strike. So my message to the workforce is straightforward: “Your union bosses have got you striking under false pretences, and rather than protecting your jobs, they are actually endangering them and the railways’ future.”

We have a platform for change. We want the unions to work with the industry and the Government to bring a much brighter future to our railways, and that means building an agile and flexible workforce, not one that strikes every time someone suggests an improvement to our railway. Strikes should be the last resort, not the first. They will stop customers choosing rail, they will put jobs at risk, they will cause misery across the country, they will hit businesses that are trying to recover from covid, and they will hurt railway workers themselves. So please, let us stop dividing the railway industry, and let us start working for a brighter future.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State, Louise Haigh.

4.29 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): No one in the country wants these strikes to go ahead, but as I have repeatedly said, even at this eleventh hour they can still be avoided. That requires Ministers to step up and show leadership. It requires them to get employers and unions round the table and address the very serious issues, involving pay and cuts in safety and maintenance staff, that are behind this dispute. The entire country is about to grind to a halt, but instead of intervening to try and stop it, the Secretary of State is washing his hands of any responsibility. On the eve of the biggest rail dispute in a generation taking place on his watch, he has still not lifted a finger to resolve it. Not one meeting. No talks, no discussions; only media interviews and a petition to the Labour party. This is a grave dereliction of duty. Should the strikes go ahead tomorrow, they will represent a catastrophic failure of leadership. Ministers owe it to all those impacted by this serious disruption to get around the table for last-ditch talks to sort it out and avert it. If the Secretary of State will not listen to me —[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Can the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) and the right hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) either go outside or be quiet for a little while?

Louise Haigh: If the Secretary of State will not listen to me, he should at least listen to his own colleague and former parliamentary aide, the right hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), who said yesterday:

“I can tell you the only way out of a dispute is via negotiation. I’d call on all parties including the Government to get around the table because this is going to have a huge negative impact on people’s lives.”

The Secretary of State’s own MPs and the public know that the only way to sort this out is for him to do his job.

But that is not all, because this week it was revealed that the Secretary of State had not only boycotted the talks but tied the hands of those at the table. He and his Department failed to give the train operating companies—a party to the talks—any mandate to negotiate whatsoever. One source close to the negotiations said:

“Without a mandate from Government we can’t even address the pay question.”

Today, the Rail Delivery Group confirmed that it had not even begun those discussions. That is the reality. These talks are a sham, because Ministers have set them up to fail. It is for the Government to settle this dispute. They are integral to these negotiations, which cannot be resolved unless the Secretary of State is at the table, but it is becoming clearer by the day that Ministers would rather provoke this dispute than lift a finger to resolve it.

This is the same Transport Secretary who just a few short weeks ago was feigning outrage over the disgraceful behaviour of P&O and who is now adopting its playbook. Replacing skilled, safety-critical staff with agency workers cannot and must not be an option. So what exactly has changed between the Secretary of State calling on the public to boycott P&O and now, when he is suggesting that that behaviour should be legalised?

Tomorrow we will see unprecedented disruption. We have been clear: we do not want the strikes to happen. Where we are in government, we are doing our job. In Labour-run Wales, a strike by train staff has been avoided. Employers, unions and the Government have come together to manage change. That is what any responsible Government would be doing right now, because whether it is today, tomorrow or next week, the only way this dispute will be resolved is with a resolution on pay and job security. The Secretary of State owes it to the hundreds of thousands of workers who depend on our railways and the tens of thousands of workers employed on them to find that deal.

Those rail workers are not the enemy. They are people who showed real bravery during the pandemic to keep our country going. They showed solidarity to make sure other workers kept going into work. Some lost colleagues and friends as a result. They are the very same people to whom the Prime Minister promised a high-wage economy a year ago before presiding over the biggest fall in living standards since records began. There is still time for the Secretary of State to do the right thing, the brave thing, and show responsibility. Patients, schoolchildren, low-paid workers—the entire country needs a resolution and they will not forgive this Government if they do not step in and resolve this. Even now, at this late hour, I urge the Secretary of State: get around the table and do your job.

Grant Shapps: The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) used a lot of words to avoid saying the four words, “I condemn the strikes.” She can practise saying it if she likes. I condemn the strikes—will she?

I remind the House that the hon. Lady is a former union official. She will therefore know better than most that negotiations are always held between the employers and the unions. She calls on the Government to get the parties around the table, but they were around the table.

[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) is right that they are not now, because the union has just walked out to call a press conference to say the strikes are on.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley is wrong when she says these strikes are about pay, safety and job cuts. Let us take them in turn. Pay—the unions wrongly told their workers that there would be no pay rise. There will be a pay rise because the pay freeze is coming to an end, so that is untrue.

Safety—it is unsafe to have people walking down the track to check the condition of the lines when it can be done by trains that can take 70,000 pictures a minute and by drones that can look at the lines from overhead. Safety is about updating outdated working practices. If the hon. Lady cared about safety, she would care about modernisation.

Job cuts—the hon. Lady will know there has already been a call for voluntary job cuts. In fact, 5,000-plus people came forward, and 2,700 have been accepted. This is about ensuring we have a railway that is fit for the post-covid world. It is therefore crazy that the RMT jumped the gun and, before the talks had a chance to get anywhere, launched into strikes.

The hon. Lady's call for the Government to be more involved is a desperate attempt to deflect from the fact the Labour party and its constituency Labour parties have received £250,000 from the RMT. And that is nothing—Labour has received £100 million from the unions over the last 10 years, and Labour Members are here today, as ever, failing to condemn strikes that will hurt ordinary people, that will hurt kids trying to do their GCSEs and A-levels, that will hurt people trying to get to hospital appointments that were delayed during covid, and that will even see veterans miss armed forces celebrations this week.

There is no excuse for the hon. Lady and her Front-Bench team sitting on the fence. I can almost feel her pain as she resists saying the four words, "I condemn the strikes."

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call the Chairman of the Transport Committee, Huw Merriman.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I find it extremely bizarre for the Secretary of State to be blamed for not being in the room when these talks, which were ongoing when the RMT called the strikes, were all about intricate, technical reforms of which we would not expect politicians to be in charge, and indeed when the RMT has said it will not negotiate with a Conservative Government. He does not need to waste his time responding to that.

I was down at the port of Southampton with the Select Committee last week, and 30% of everything that comes in on those ships goes to the rest of the country by rail freight. These strikes will affect everyone, not just rail passengers. What are we doing to preserve our rail freight routes?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the cause of the strikes and about it being bizarre that the union walked out this afternoon while the talks were still ongoing, and while still trying to claim there should be more talks.

My hon. Friend is right that the disruption will create a major problem for rail freight, which has been doing pretty well as more freight shifts to rail post covid—about 9% of the overall total. We are now working as closely as possible with colleagues at Network Rail to design the strike day and post-strike day timetables, to make sure that as much freight as possible can travel, but I will not mislead him or the House, as it will be very difficult to achieve. Anyone who cares about our supply chains in this country should be against these unnecessary and unwarranted strikes.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What a pile of nonsense. The glee with which the Secretary of State spoke on Thursday and again today rather tells the story. He spoke of the support for the rail industry and the fact that no one has lost their job. If only we had seen that same support for the aviation industry, which was promised, we would not be seeing the scenes we are up and down this country at airports across this land. In response to P&O's unacceptable behaviour in replacing staff with agency staff, he called for the company to be boycotted and for it to reverse its decision. Now he is planning to legislate to allow agency workers to replace striking staff. Why does he not care for the rights of rail workers, given that he appeared to care so deeply for the rights of ferry workers?

ScotRail, with the encouragement of the Scottish Government, has negotiated a settlement with drivers to end their pay dispute, get services back up and running and support workers. Despite that, services will still be disrupted as a consequence of the industrial action that the UK Government have stoked with Network Rail workers. Does the Secretary of State agree that devolving Network Rail powers to Scotland is the only way to protect Scotland? Despite his claim that the unions are solely responsible for these strikes, we now know that the UK Government have prevented meaningful negotiations. With inflation heading over 10% and a Tory cost of living crisis, how can he explain or defend preventing negotiations on wage increases, unless stoking an industrial dispute to force through anti-union laws is actually the Government's aim?

Finally, does the Secretary of State share my concern for the welfare of the Scottish Conservatives, none of whom are with us today? On the ScotRail-ASLEF issue, the Scottish Conservatives' Twitter account said

"The SNP must sort this mess out and address the travel misery facing commuters."

Graham Simpson MSP, the Scottish Conservative transport spokesperson, no less, called for the Scottish Government to get involved and get round the table. That is the difference in approach we get from the Scottish Conservatives depending on which Government they are addressing. So does the Secretary of State think that the Scottish Tory approach is shameful; shameless; the standard utterly hypocritical politics of the Scottish Tories; or all of the above?

Grant Shapps: I will address the point about P&O, because the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) also raised it. I am surprised that they cannot see the glaring and obvious differences in the disgraceful treatment of P&O workers. For a start, it fired its workers and brought in foreign workers at below the minimum wage—I would have thought that was a fairly obvious

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difference. Secondly, no one's wage is being cut here. Thirdly, let me remind the hon. Lady that in the industry we are talking about train drivers have a median salary of £59,000 and rail workers have a median salary of £44,000, which compares rather favourably with that of nurses, who have a median salary of £31,000, and care workers, whose median salary is perhaps £21,000. No one is talking about cutting salaries; everybody here is trying to get the modernisation that could secure the future of our railways, and it is a great pity to see respected Opposition Front Benchers trying to mislead the public by somehow suggesting that this is something to do with the P&O situation when it is entirely separate and different.

The other point worth quashing is the idea that somehow we have not provided a negotiating mandate or that we have told Network Rail not to negotiate. That is simply not true. Network Rail has a negotiating mandate and is able to negotiate. It is negotiating on a package of measures that includes more than 20 areas of reform, which are deeply technical and require not only the input but the work of the employers to negotiate. In return for these reforms lies the route to better salaries—higher pay. But I want to ensure, once and for all, that we quash the idea that our railway workers are poorly paid in this country; they are not.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): What has been the monthly rate of taxpayer subsidy to the railways so far this year? What additional flexibilities could managers use to try to get a bigger proportion of services running even on a strike day?

Grant Shapps: My right hon. Friend is right to discuss the subsidy, which has been £16 billion as a whole through covid—or £16 billion committed, which means that we do not have the exact number yet for the amount of that which is still going towards the operations this year. One thing I can say to him is that without that support the railways simply would not have been able to operate. It is the equivalent of £160,000 per individual rail worker. To turn around and call these strikes is a heck of a way to thank taxpayers. We have lost around a fifth of the income from rail. I hear Mick Lynch, the leader of the RMT, claim that the Government are cutting the money that is going to the railways, but that is a fundamental misunderstanding on his part. The money that is missing is the £2 billion of passenger fares that are not being paid because people are not travelling.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): In my area, we witnessed the Paddington and Southall crashes. One of my constituents was a driver who lost his life. We were told then about the modernisation of safety inspections and it was the workers who pointed out what risks they caused. We hear today that there will be a 50% cut in the safety inspections of the infrastructure. Does the Secretary of State really think the British public have more confidence in his assessment of safety on the rails than in that of the workers who actually implement the safety inspections? I believe the British public expect the Secretary of State not to come in here ranting to provoke a strike but to behave with the dignity and responsibility of the high office that he holds.

Grant Shapps: As the House will recall from last week, the right hon. Gentleman receives donations from the very union that is going on strike—

John McDonnell *indicated dissent.*

Grant Shapps: He is saying no, but I believe that is the case.

John McDonnell: It is not true and you know that.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I cannot have a dialogue. I recognise that there is a difference of opinion. It might have to be settled at another point. We will stick to this point and if the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) wants to raise the matter later, I will listen to him.

Grant Shapps: Similar to the right hon. Gentleman—this is where we have a lot in common—I had the very sad Hatfield rail accident in my constituency, and Potters Bar is next to where I live. Those were two major rail accidents in respect of which the maintenance of the railway was absolutely key.

I have heard Mick Lynch of the RMT mention this figure of a 50% reduction in safety staff. What is wrong about that is, as I explained in my statement, if we can have automation, with trains taking 70,000 images per minute, and use drones and other technologies, it will put our railway at risk not to use those things, because the modern standards that are required for maintenance will not be available.

The right hon. Gentleman asked how I know about these matters; as Transport Secretary, I have the unfortunate task of having to read all the Rail Accident Investigation Branch investigations, and I sometimes have to respond to coroners as well. Recently, I read with great sadness about a man who was killed while walking along the track to maintain it. We need to get rid of these outdated, outmoded ways of carrying out maintenance and really look after the safety of the railways.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I think the House will appreciate that the way to deal with increasing rail safety and reducing risk to rail workers is not really across the Floor of the House but between the employers and the union safety representatives. Further progress should then come.

The rail unions have a six-month authority to cause industrial disruption; they should not be using it straightaway. In my view, my local passengers—most of whom earn less than rail workers and some of whom do not earn anything at all because they are students trying to take exams this week—would prefer it if both sides of the House could call on the unions to postpone these disputes until they will not affect so many people so harshly. I think, as one of the most union-friendly Conservatives, that my voice is not necessarily going to be heard by the union leaders, but if Labour would join in we could say in a cross-party way, “Postpone the strikes this week, get on with the talks and negotiations, and if people want to take time off to go to a TUC or Labour rally, they should come back to the talks, not just go to the media.”

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is of course absolutely right about this. The absolute truth is that we need to have modernisation—we need to improve our railways. If we work together to do it, we can have a far improved railway and bring back passengers, and we can make easier things such as ticketing—currently, only one in eight tickets are purchased in a ticket office, yet we have the same set-up, with people sat behind the glass, as we have had since the 1990s. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we can modernise and improve the railways, but what is required is for the Labour party, which is much closer to the unions, to endorse that.

Perhaps if I can, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will clear up my exchange with the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). I understand that it is his constituency Labour party that has received the £30,000 in RMT funding.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): When there is an impasse in negotiation, it is the responsibility of all the partners to do whatever they can to resolve the dispute. I have been talking today to railway workers, and they are desperate to see an end to this dispute, but they do need a change in the dynamics. Will the Secretary of State stop his grandstanding, enter the room that the unions are willing to occupy, and engage in dialogue and see where that takes him?

Grant Shapps: The hon. Lady, whose own constituency Labour party received £3,000 from the RMT, may have missed the leader of her union address a press conference about an hour ago, where he made it clear that he had walked out of the talks to which she is encouraging the employers to return. We are ready to speak. We want to see this settled. Pay offers have been put down, but modernisation is required in return. It takes two to tango.

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): UKHospitality, the hospitality trade association, believes that the strikes tomorrow, Thursday and Saturday will have a massive effect on the hospitality industry. We are talking about not just the major employers, but the small, family-run restaurants and cafés. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, rather than taking these strikes, the RMT should be going back to the talks and trying to stop these strikes, so that we can protect the jobs within the important hospitality industry?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is right. These strikes will cost the railways a lot. They will particularly cost people who are unable to travel—particularly the lowest paid, because they often have jobs to which people still have to physically turn up. There is probably not a sector that will suffer more than the hospitality sector. Just as this country is recovering from covid, it is completely unforgivable of the unions to call their members out on strike when they are doing so artificially and without good cause, while negotiations are still continuing, and on the false prospectus of there not being pay rises when there were always going to be pay rises.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): The Secretary of State has mentioned on a number of occasions the various different people who will be seriously impacted by the strike: the exam students; those with medical appointments; and many, many others. Given that he insists that there was nothing that he could possibly

have done to avert this strike, can he tell us instead what conversations he has had with the NHS, with education leaders and with others to understand what his Department can do to help health and education staff get to work for the rest of this week to support their critical industry?

Grant Shapps: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question and, indeed, for her vote as well. When this House voted last week with a 278 majority condemning the strikes, I believe that she and her party were in the Lobby putting their position clearly on the record, unlike the Official Opposition.

On those discussions with the NHS, with teachers and the rest, I am engaged with the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, which is the part of Government that co-ordinates with me and fellow Secretaries of State across Government to try, as far as possible, to ease some of the strains and stresses that will come. For example, in the case of exams where people may turn up late, we have been working with the exam authorities. However, there is no magic solution. There are 2,500 stations in this country and more than 20,000 miles of track. The fact is that, if they are closed down as the unions are doing, many people will suffer.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): My constituents from Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable pay enormous sums of money to commute into London. Has the Secretary of State done any modelling on the impact of some of the pay rises that are being asked for and the ability of people to be able to afford to travel on the railways?

Grant Shapps: As Transport Secretary, I find that a lot of the time people talk or indeed complain to me about the cost of a ticket on our rail, which can be very high. It is worth knowing that one third of the ticket price is made up of the salary of those who run the trains. As I have said all along, I want to see our railway workers paid well for doing their work, and in fact they are paid very well for doing their work, but we must run our railways as efficiently as possible to keep the ticket price down for the passengers. That is the most important part of the reforms needed and what is unfortunately at the heart of this strike: not pay, but the reform. To answer my hon. Friend's question about his constituents, I am arranging for people who have annual season tickets, rather than having to rely on a delay repay system, to be able to apply to get their money back for the days they are unable to travel this week.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): The Secretary of State knows that the Government have cut £4 billion from our transport system, including £2 billion from national rail. As a result, the companies involved have decided to impose a real-terms pay cut, lengthen the working day for new starters, attack rail workers' pensions and cut thousands of jobs. That is likely to lead to much poorer conditions for staff and potentially less safe services for passengers. We are on the eve of the biggest rail strike in a generation. When will he step up to his responsibility and do what he can to resolve the dispute?

Grant Shapps: I am afraid that reading the RMT brief is what leads Labour Members to believe a bunch of untruths. Let me start with the first one: a £4 billion cut, the hon. Lady says. I think I have already explained that, but that is the passengers not coming on the railway.

[Grant Shapps]

That is why there is a cut in revenue to the railways. What a terrible way this is to address that—going on strike, closing down the railway and putting more passengers off. It makes no sense. She talks about pension reform, but there has been considerable progress made, and it is the Pensions Regulator that needs there to be reform, otherwise the system would fall over. There has been considerable progress made in some of these areas, but again it is worth pointing out to the House that the rail pension age for earlier retirees is 62, and the pension can be about £40,000 a year. Those are rightly generous terms, but they must come in return for reforms to the rail system, otherwise it will fall over. It is not the Government cutting money; it is passengers not travelling.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): Meir station was announced at the weekend, and it is fantastic that we are moving to the next stage of the restoring your railway fund. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, just when we are trying to attract more people back on to the railways and investing in things such as Meir station and the restoring your railway programme, it is not the right time to be striking, and that these totally reckless actions by the unions must be condemned?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Here is the thing: I know the Opposition would love to paint us as being anti-railway, as if we want to close it down or we do not care about it, but the opposite is true. There has not been a Government for decades—perhaps ever—who have invested so much in the railway. If we think about the £96 billion for the integrated rail review in the north and the midlands, the £35 billion of ongoing improvements, maintenance and upgrades, and the fantastic announcement on Meir station as part of the restoring your railway bid, reversing the Beeching cuts, there has never been a more pro-rail Government. We just need a union that is prepared to work to enable it to continue to thrive.

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): To declare an interest, my father-in-law is a train driver and a member of the RMT. I am saddened that from the Government Benches we are not hearing the same loving rhetoric towards our railway staff that we did during the pandemic. The Secretary of State called our railway workers heroes. What has changed, and why will he not get around the negotiating table and see what he can do?

Grant Shapps: I wish the hon. Lady's relation well in his job, and I hope he can get back to it very soon. I have just explained that this Government are putting £96 billion into northern powerhouse rail, £35 billion into upgrades and more money into the restoring your railway fund.¹ There has never been a more pro-rail Government, as far as I can see, in history. However, it is also the case that, during the pandemic, we pumped in £16 billion, equivalent to £600 per household in this country or £160,000 per railway worker, to keep them in their jobs. We love the railways, and I like the people who work on them as well—I just want them to work, that is all.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): I am sure the Secretary of State will join me in thanking the wider members of the railway economy who will have to come together to sustain a skeleton services over

the coming weeks. Will he draw a conclusion, though, from the 2016 Southern and Thameslink strike, where a lack of familiarity with the Passenger Assist service for disabled passengers meant that many could not complete their journeys and in the worst-case scenario were left abandoned on deserted station platforms after the last service of the day? When he discusses contingency planning with the many train operators, will he bear that very salient point in mind, because it was forgotten last time and had to be relearned yet again?

Grant Shapps: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who is a distinguished former Rail Minister and knows a great deal about the service. He is absolutely right about Passenger Assist. We are expanding that service by, for example, speeding up response times and introducing things like apps and standards to make sure that people can use our trains. We will shortly complete the work that we have promised on putting in tactile pavements around station platforms to remove another potential risk of using our railways. I am fully on board with everything that he said—we just need our railways running, though.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): My mum is one of the RMT members who will be taking industrial action this week, along with many of my constituents, the majority of whom are cleaning workers, catering and gateline staff, and other ancillary roles who are not even on a real living wage and at the sharp end of this Government's cost of living crisis. My mum and the other key workers in transport are not striking because they want to; it is a last resort because they feel they have been left no choice. A real-terms cut to their pay or the threat of losing their job altogether is far more than the wages they will lose in striking to defend themselves. Will the Transport Secretary therefore tell the House what steps he has taken to enable train operating companies to make an offer on a deal so that this crisis can be fairly resolved and the strikes averted?

Grant Shapps: They have actually already made an offer—the hon. Lady may not be aware—that the RMT has talked about this afternoon and clearly rejected as well. She talks about the cost of living crisis but fails to mention that it is a global inflationary problem caused not only by coronavirus but now a war in Ukraine on which this country has helped to lead the response. She talks about the salaries of people on the railway. As I have said several times, I want the salaries to be higher. There will be a pay increase this year for her mum and for everyone else. It is important to recognise that a responsible Government have to make the judgment between railway workers, nurses, teachers, care workers and many others. In that regard, she should know that in the past 10 years there has been a 39% increase in railway workers' salaries compared with just 16% for nurses. We do need to make sure that the fair settlement is fair for everybody.¹

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): Accepting that there is never a good time to strike, does the Secretary of State agree that to do so when the cost of fuel is at impossibly high levels, people are struggling to hold down their jobs and rebuild their businesses in a post-covid environment and children are in the middle of their

1. [Official Report, 22 June 2022, Vol. 716, c. 8MC.]

1. [Official Report, 5 September 2022, Vol. 719, c. 2MC.]

exams shows a callousness from union bosses that should be condemned, and not supported by Labour Members?

Grant Shapps: Exactly. I think the whole House has noticed that their inability to simply say that they condemn the strikes is the most striking part of this debate. This will hurt ordinary people. It will hurt the cleaners who rely on trains to get to their jobs but will not be able to get there, and in some cases will therefore not get paid. This is a strike led by the union bosses who have misled their members into thinking that there would not be a pay rise without striking when that was never the case.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. As I travelled today from Belfast to London, I was very aware of the hundreds of accents and the thousands of visitors. With all the strikes affecting so many tourists who rely on the trains to get about, what steps are being taken to provide information for visitors who do not know how a strike will affect them, and how can we do more to see an end to these strikes?

Grant Shapps: That is very much one of the things that we are working on through the civil contingencies secretariat. I am working with my right hon. Friend Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that tourists can still receive information through their hotels, bed and breakfasts or wherever they happen to be staying, because they would not necessarily know to look at things such as National Rail Enquiries, as I hope others would. We are trying to push the message out as widely as possible, but it will be far from perfect. Again, just as this country was starting to recover—just as we came out of coronavirus first, because we got the jabs done first—this is the last thing, among others, that the tourism sector needs.

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): It is sad that the Labour Front-Bench team will not condemn the strikes that are happening tomorrow, but in Wales, Labour is going further and denying their existence. In my constituency, which I assure the House is in Wales, there are no strikes tomorrow, Thursday and Saturday—Labour is calling them “travel disruption”. I ask the Secretary of State not to forget about Wales and to make sure that we get the trains running again. When is a strike not a strike?

Grant Shapps: I notice that the tone of the Opposition Front-Bench spokespeople has changed considerably since last week, when they each stood up and claimed that in whichever part of our great United Kingdom they run the Government, there were somehow not going to be strikes. The RMT strikes affect the entire country—Scotland, Wales and England. The only place that is being spared is Northern Ireland. The track and the responsibility of the unions—the RMT—to work with Network Rail means that the disruption, I am afraid, will be wholesale.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): May I press the Secretary of State, as a number of hon. Members have—*[Interruption.]* No, I have not received any money, if that is the conversation that he is having with the

Minister of State, Department for Transport, the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton). I want to press him on agency workers. He has been asked if he will legislate to allow agency workers to effectively bust industrial action in future. What guarantees will he give that those agency workers will have the necessary training in safety and all the rest of it? Is he suggesting that Network Rail should break the law this week by hiring agency workers, and who will pay the fines if it does?

Grant Shapps: No, Network Rail obviously cannot do that this week, but yes, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will bring forward legislation quickly to allow for what the hon. Gentleman calls agency workers. For this purpose, that is actually more about transferable skills. It will mean that somebody who is sitting at a screen in a control room and is fully qualified to run the screen next door, but at the moment is not allowed to do so because of some antiquated union rules that prevent it, will be allowed to do so. That means that the whole country will not be held to ransom by union barons who prefer to pursue their narrow agenda, supported by the Labour party, when ordinary hard-working people want to get to work. We will be introducing that legislation, and we will be doing it very quickly.

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): Tomorrow will see yet another day of tube strikes in London, which will be the 53rd day since Sadiq Khan became Mayor of London, even though he was elected on the basis of promising zero strikes. That strike will cause untold misery and disruption for my constituents at a time when businesses in London are just beginning to recover from coronavirus. Does my right hon. Friend agree that London deserves better than Sadiq Khan and his union paymasters, and that London Labour Members should condemn the strikes, rather than tacitly supporting them?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. She and the whole House will have noticed that while the Opposition were singing the praises of other parts of the Union, including what they call Labour Wales—I do not think it is Labour at all, but Labour runs the Administration—for not striking, they failed to mention that their own Mayor of London has had 53 days of strikes. The truth is that we need to move ahead with automated trains on parts of the London underground; the metro in Paris has them and it is time we got on with it here.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Earlier, the Secretary of State waved around a document relating to 28 areas of reform that he thinks need to be implemented to modernise our railway. Has he stipulated that they must be agreed before rail operators can negotiate pay?

Grant Shapps: I will recount, but I think it was 20 areas, and no, I have not done that, but it is the kind of modernisation we would expect. For example, I was just looking at the list, and one working practice means that paysheets have to be done on paper, whereas it would clearly make sense to do them electronically. It would save a lot of time and a lot of money, and I cannot really see why anyone would be against it, but it is a working practice that is not allowed. I mentioned

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being able to move between different very similar roles but only where somebody is fully qualified, and those kinds of flexibilities in rostering do not exist.

It is pretty much like trying to run an orchestra for Network Rail, but it does not know who is going to turn up or which instruments they will bring, and it has no ability to tell them where to sit—and then it is supposed to make the railway run. We have to modernise our railways.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): Obviously, we have this Tuesday and this Thursday, and many of my constituents will have to put up with this chaos. They will also have to put up with it on Saturday, and also on 2 July, when ASLEF will also be organising the drivers striking in Ipswich. But this is something they have got used to—constant disruption at the weekends in Ipswich. Recently, we had six weekends in a row where we had replacement bus services. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that weekend services should not be an afterthought, but are increasingly becoming more important?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I caught Mick Lynch, the leader of the RMT, on TV at his press conference after he walked out of the talks, saying that there is no need for any reductions or changes because, on the basis of last week's figures, 90% of the passengers had come back. That is completely wrong. Those numbers are not accurate; a fifth of the passengers are still missing. However, there are the occasional lines and the occasional times when 90%-plus have come back, and they tend to be at the weekends. It tends to be on the Saturday and Sunday services, and is all the more reason why we need a seven-day railway, like any other business. We need to be able to run it on a Sunday, because compared with 1919, when these rules were put in place, the world has changed.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): My constituents will not be able to use Merseyrail trains tomorrow, but not because there is a strike at Merseyrail. There is no strike because Labour-run Liverpool city region has met the rail unions and avoided strikes at Merseyrail. However, there still will not be any trains in Merseyside because this Conservative Transport Secretary is responsible for Network Rail, where there is a strike, and he has refused to meet the unions for months. Labour has found a way to resolve potential disputes in Wales and in Merseyside, so what is it about this Transport Secretary that prevents him from finding solutions and stopping these strikes?

Grant Shapps: The hon. Member may want to reflect the same question to the Mayor of London, I suppose, for the same reasons. I am delighted that Merseyrail has been able to do its thing. I do hope that he will now join me—will he join me?—in condemning the strikes, because I think that would have real weight from the Labour and unions party, but the Opposition will not do it, will they? They will not condemn these strikes, and millions of people up and down this country have taken note.

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree with me that Labour Members who refuse to condemn these strikes have no regard for the

potential effect on the exam results of children taking GCSEs and A-levels up and down the country? Both the AQA and Edexcel—both well-known exam boards—have confirmed that they will not allow the strikes or their impact to be used as grounds for appeal for students who arrive late or perhaps are unable to arrive at all. Given the experience that schoolchildren in this country have had over the last two years, which has been the worst in our lifetimes, does the Secretary of State agree that it is utterly reprehensible for all sides of this House not to be condemning these rail strikes absolutely?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend puts it brilliantly, and she is absolutely right. It is actually callous. That is what it is. I have a daughter who is taking an exam on Thursday. Thursday is a strike day, and she will now go in by car. I can see that the stress is already building on her, because she is now worried about getting there. Yet the Opposition have nothing to say on the subject. They refuse to condemn the strikes. My hon. Friend is right: it is a callous approach.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): The Secretary of State came into the Chamber with confected rage about workers, comparing them with '70s workers. I do not know how old he was when the Thatcher anti-unions laws came in, but they are what the unions are working under. They are holding up their obligations under the law as it is. He is ultimately responsible for the rail network across the UK, so why does he not get around the table and deal with that?

Grant Shapps: First, I assure the hon. Gentleman that it is anything but confected rage when I see what is happening not just to my daughter and others taking exams but to hard-pressed people across the country who cannot get to their jobs as well as veterans who want to go and celebrate. Secondly, will he join me in condemning the strikes?

Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con): Tomorrow, as Kellogg's is in my constituency, I was due to host its breakfast club awards in Parliament to honour the 5,000 schools and their teachers who diligently run Kellogg's breakfast clubs, which aim to tackle food insecurity. Thanks to the strike, the awards have been cancelled. Does my right hon. Friend agree that by striking for more, the RMT takes away from the many?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and she gives another example of how not condemning the strikes is being part of the problem. People must be prepared to stand up for what they believe in. If they want school trips, companies doing corporate social responsibility and people to be able to visit Parliament—all those different activities—they have to be on the side of people using the railway, and they have to condemn the strikes.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): It is disgusting how the Secretary of State and the Government have smeared and continue to smear ordinary, hard-working, decent people such as railway cleaners, safety operatives and ticket staff who just want to keep their jobs and get a decent, fair pay rise. Does it not go to show which side the Government are on when they seek to slash workers' pay while the train companies continue to make hundreds and hundreds of millions of pounds in profits?

Grant Shapps: I was just checking whether the hon. Member is repeating the RMT's handout, because what he says is factually untrue in the same way as a series of things that the RMT and Mick Lynch said on television and at the press conference this afternoon. One of the untruths is that anybody is trying to cut anyone's pay. That, I am afraid, is being propagated by Opposition Front Benchers, who try to suggest that this is somehow like P&O. That is not true. We are putting salaries up. We want people to earn decent wages for decent days of work. We just need to get the reform so that we are not stuck in the 1970s on a railway that is having to recover from coronavirus.

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con): These strikes will cause untold harm to businesses, students and vulnerable people who have lived through some of the toughest of the last two years. Considering the huge sums of money that the RMT donates to the Labour party, does the Secretary of State agree that Labour should publish a table of donor receipts so that constituents can lodge a claim for their lost wages from Labour party coffers or from the extortionate union salaries?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): In generations past, the railway industry played a major part in developing seaside resorts such as Cleethorpes. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, were these damaging strikes to continue, all they would succeed in doing is damaging many small businesses in communities such as mine? Will he do all that he can to ensure that working people can get to work on the trains?

Grant Shapps: This is the great irony: the people whom the strike will hurt the most are not the white-collar workers who will sit behind their computers using Zoom and Microsoft Teams but the people trying to support tourist industries in places such as Cleethorpes—people trying to run bed and breakfasts—and people trying to get to work to do their jobs, and often they can least afford to lose a day's work. However, they will lose not one day's but at least three days' work, and there will be chaos on the other days of this week. It is a disgrace, and the Opposition cannot find their way to condemning it, which is disgraceful, too.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): The trade unions decided to go on strike without even knowing what the industry was offering on pay and conditions.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that that exposes the strikes for exactly what they are: political game playing from the Labour party and its trade union paymasters, without a second thought for the hard-working travelling British public?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is exactly right. He has seen through it. The leader, Mick Lynch, said that he is "nostalgic" for the union power of the '70s, and that is exactly what they are driving for. As my hon. Friend rightly points out, Mick Lynch called his members out on strike, telling them that it was about getting a pay increase, but not telling them that they would already be getting a pay increase because the pay freeze had ended.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con): The Labour party often says that it represents working people, but having taken £100 million from trade unions, and having failed to condemn the strikes, does the Labour party really represent misery and chaos?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This statement has been running for an hour, and we still have not heard the four simple words, "We condemn the strikes."

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): This strike is a real kick in the teeth for hard-working taxpayers, who have dug deep over the past 18 months to keep this industry alive. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Labour party—the spineless party opposite—should grow a backbone and condemn these strikes?

Grant Shapps: That is an appropriate place to end. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. People have dug deep—that is exactly what they have done; it was £600 per household. People are furious. They paid out that money to make sure that nobody lost their jobs, and what thanks have they got? Where is the reward? Where is the "thank you" for keeping the railway going? It is a strike that will put people out of pay and hit people's pockets once again, and Labour Members cannot even find their way to say, "We condemn the strikes." It is a disgrace.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the Secretary of State and all Members who took part in that item of business.

Points of Order

5.21 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Ahead of last week's debate considering these strikes, I sought counsel from the Standards Commissioner about the declaration of Member's financial interests. You will know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that many members of the Labour party have a relationship with the trade unions that we are incredibly proud of, including with the RMT. The advice that I received from the Standards Commissioner ahead of that debate, and therefore ahead of today, stated under the requirements for declaration:

"Members are required, subject to the paragraphs below, to declare any financial interests which satisfy the test of relevance, including:

a) past financial interests (normally limited to those active within the last twelve months)".

It is my recollection that the general election was two and a half years ago, so can you advise, Madam Deputy Speaker, on whether a declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests should keep being raised two and a half years after it has been made?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Lady for her very reasonable point of order. There has been some confusion as to what is required. She read out advice and rules from the Standards Committee. I believe what she said is absolutely correct, and it is useful for the House to hear that.

I cannot judge here and now, without having had a while to look at all the circumstances, exactly what any individual hon. Member should do when they have received in the past, are receiving, or might receive in the future, any financial help. There is, however, a very simple principle that transparency and honesty is always best. I know the hon. Lady will agree with me on that, and if any Member has doubt as to whether or not they should disclose anything about their own financial situation, I suggest that they think about what is the honourable thing to do, and what is the transparent and reasonable thing to do, rather than ask exactly where the line would come were it to be challenged in a court of law or a committee. If we all stick to principles, rather than the exact black and white of the rules, we are likely to have a Parliament that works best. I honestly think that the vast majority of Members act honourably in this respect. Does that answer the hon. Lady's question?

Rachael Maskell *indicated assent.*

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Members may be aware that early editions of Saturday's *Times* included a story regarding the conduct of the Prime Minister when he was Foreign Secretary. The piece alleged that the Prime Minister attempted to appoint the then Carrie Symonds, now Carrie Johnson, as his chief of staff—a taxpayer-funded role paying a significant salary—at a time when their relationship was not public.

I have particular concerns regarding the disappearance of the story from *The Times*. A Downing Street spokesperson has confirmed that they did contact *The Times* and asked it to retract the story, and it has been alleged

that the Prime Minister attempted to take out an injunction. Following the resignation last week of the Prime Minister's independent adviser on ministerial standards, there is now no mechanism by which any investigation under the ministerial code can be undertaken into the Prime Minister's conduct, other than at the behest of the Prime Minister himself. While the ministerial code remains a matter for Government, Members will remain concerned by the standards and conduct of those in Downing Street. Can you advise, Madam Deputy Speaker, on ways in which Members of Parliament such as I might be able to make assessments of the Prime Minister's conduct in relation to standards following the adviser's resignation?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order and, of course, it is not a point of order for the Chair. I understand that she is using the device of a point of order to raise on the Floor of the House a matter that she thinks is of political interest. My understanding is that this was an article in a newspaper, and one can believe or not what one reads in a newspaper. If she is concerned, as she said she is, about allegations that might have a bearing on matters to be considered by the Standards Committee, she should raise the matter with the Standards Committee.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. An investigation by tonight's BBC "Panorama" programme appears to show that social media companies are still directing vulnerable young people to content that promotes the carrying of knives. The programme reveals this one and a half years after my constituent, 13-year-old Oliver Stephens, was brutally murdered in a Reading park in a knife attack that was linked to social media. To make matters worse, the "Panorama" investigation, I believe, shows that young people who are opposed to knife crime, and who have stated that they are opposed to it and concerned by it, are sent damaging content about knives. This is utterly appalling. Our whole community is shocked, deeply upset and angry at the behaviour of these companies, and this is happening at the very time that the Online Safety Bill is being debated in this House. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make this point of order. I wonder whether you could direct me as to how I can raise this with Ministers.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for having given me notice of his intention to raise it. First, may I say what a terrible tragedy it was that young Olly Stephens, aged only 13, was murdered in this dreadful way? No one must ever diminish such a dreadful occurrence. However, I am afraid that as I said to the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain), this is not a matter for the Chair, although I understand the hon. Gentleman's desire to use the device of a point of order to raise the matter on the Floor of the House. It will undoubtedly come to public attention if, as he has described, the programme is to be shown on television this evening.

I say two things to the hon. Gentleman. First, as he points out himself, the Online Safety Bill is currently going through the House and therefore there is an opportunity for him to raise the matter then. Secondly, he might wish to apply for an Adjournment debate or something of that kind to have a proper discussion about a very serious matter on the Floor of the House.

BILLS PRESENTED

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): As the House will be aware, a great many Bills are to be presented today. To save time and get on with today's main business, when Members are presenting more than one consecutive Bill I will accept private notice of the dates of Second Reading for those Bills; those dates will be minuted accordingly in *Hansard* and in *Votes and Proceedings*. I will ask Members presenting individual Bills to name the date for Second Reading in the usual way.

The first Bill was to be presented by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely), but he is unable, for very good reasons, to be present today, so we will move to the next Bill on the Order Paper.

CARBON EMISSIONS (BUILDINGS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Jerome Mayhew presented a Bill to require the whole-life carbon emissions of buildings to be reported; to set limits on embodied carbon emissions in the construction of buildings; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 November, and to be printed (Bill 34).

CARE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to make provision about meeting the needs of people providing care and of people receiving care; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 9 September, and to be printed (Bill 35).

FLASHING IMAGES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Tom Hunt presented a Bill to make provision for an offence in relation to the sending of flashing images; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 February 2023, and to be printed (Bill 36).

VETERANS ADVISORY AND PENSIONS COMMITTEES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Robin Millar presented a Bill to make provision about veterans advisory and pensions committees; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 February 2023, and to be printed (Bill 37).

PENSIONS DASHBOARDS (PROHIBITION OF INDEMNIFICATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mary Robinson presented a Bill to make provision about prohibiting the trustees and managers of pension schemes from being indemnified in respect of penalties imposed under pensions dashboards regulations.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 15 July, and to be printed (Bill 38).

FIREARMS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Shaun Bailey presented a Bill to make provision about the regulation of certain rifle ranges and shooting galleries; to make provision for an offence in relation to the possession of component parts of ammunition; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 39).

PALESTINE STATEHOOD (RECOGNITION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Layla Moran presented a Bill to make provision in connection with the recognition of the State of Palestine.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 40).

CHALK STREAMS (PROTECTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sarah Green presented a Bill to provide for a category of protection for chalk streams for the purpose of providing additional protections from pollution, abstraction and other forms of environmental damage; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 41).

CORPORATE HOMICIDE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to amend the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 to make provision about the offence of corporate homicide; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 18 November, and to be printed (Bill 42).

SHORT-TERM AND HOLIDAY-LET ACCOMMODATION (LICENSING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Rachael Maskell presented a Bill to give local authorities the power to require licences for the conversion of domestic properties into short-term and holiday-let accommodation; to give local authorities the power to issue fines and to remove such licences when safety, noise and nuisance conditions have not been met; to make provision about banning the licensing of such properties in defined geographical areas; to give local authorities the power to vary the rates of local taxes in relation to such properties; to give local authorities the power to restrict the number of days per year for which such properties can be let; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 9 December, and to be printed (Bill 43).

COUNTRYSIDE AND RIGHTS OF WAY ACT 2000 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Caroline Lucas supported by Sir Peter Bottomley, Clive Lewis, Bell Ribeiro-Addy, Ian Byrne and Wera Hobhouse, presented a Bill to amend the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to extend the right of

public access to the countryside, including to woodlands, the Green Belt, waters and more grasslands; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 October, and to be printed (Bill 44).

COVID-19 VACCINE DAMAGE PAYMENTS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope supported by Hannah Bardell, Mr Peter Bone, Miriam Cates, Philip Davies, Richard Drax, Esther McVey, Nigel Mills, Jim Shannon, Sir Desmond Swayne, Mr William Wragg and Sir Jeremy Wright, presented a Bill to place a duty on the Secretary of State to make provision about financial assistance to persons who have suffered disablement following vaccination against Covid-19 and to the next of kin of persons who have died shortly after vaccination against Covid-19; to require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament on the merits of a no-fault compensation scheme to provide such financial assistance, on whether there should be any upper limit on the financial assistance available, on the criteria for eligibility and on whether payment should be made in all cases where there is no other reasonable cause for the death or disablement suffered; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 September, and to be printed (Bill 45).

ANIMALS (LOW-WELFARE ACTIVITIES ABROAD) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Angela Richardson presented a Bill to prohibit the sale and advertising of activities abroad which involve low standards of welfare for animals.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 February 2023, and to be printed (Bill 46).

PUBLIC ADVOCATE (NO. 2) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Maria Eagle, supported by Sir George Howarth, Derek Twigg, Alison McGovern, Dame Angela Eagle, Peter Dowd, Bill Esterson, Conor McGinn, Dan Carden, Ian Byrne, Paula Barker and Kim Johnson, presented a Bill to establish a public advocate to provide advice to, and act as data controller for, representatives of the deceased after major incidents.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 15 July, and to be printed (Bill 47).

TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE (CONSULTATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Dame Diana Johnson, supported by Karl Turner and Emma Hardy, presented a Bill to make provision about mandatory local consultation in relation to the installation of telecommunications infrastructure in residential areas; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 18 November, and to be printed (Bill 48).

HEREDITARY TITLES (FEMALE SUCCESSION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mark Jenkinson presented a Bill to make provision for the succession of female heirs to hereditary titles; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 January 2023, and to be printed (Bill 49).

MINIMUM ENERGY PERFORMANCE OF BUILDINGS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sarah Olney presented a Bill to make provision to increase the energy performance of buildings; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 50).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Owen Thompson is unable to be present today, so we move to the next Bill on the Order Paper.

PLASTICS (WET WIPES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Fleur Anderson presented a Bill to prohibit the manufacture and sale of wet wipes containing plastic; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 September, and to be printed (Bill 52).

PUBLIC BODIES (REPRESENTATION FROM DEVOLVED NATIONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Wendy Chamberlain presented a Bill to require the Government to have regard to the desirability of boards of public bodies including at least one person with relevant experience in at least one of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 53).

LOCAL AUTHORITY BOUNDARIES (REFERENDUMS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Robbie Moore presented a Bill to make provision to enable parliamentary constituency areas to form new unitary local authority areas if agreed by referendum; to make provision for such referendums; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 February 2023, and to be printed (Bill 54).

FERTILITY TREATMENT (EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Nickie Aiken presented a Bill to require employers to allow employees to take time off from work for appointments for fertility treatment; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 November, and to be printed (Bill 55).

HARES (CLOSE SEASON) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Anthony Browne presented a Bill to create an offence of killing, injuring or taking hares at certain times of the year.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 9 December, and to be printed (Bill 56).

WORKERS (PREDICTABLE TERMS AND CONDITIONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Scott Benton presented a Bill to give workers and agency workers the right to request more predictable terms and conditions of work.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 February 2023, and to be printed (Bill 57).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Helen Morgan is unable to be present today, so we move to the next Bill on the Order Paper.

SEXUALLY-MOTIVATED MANSLAUGHTER (SENTENCING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Laura Farris presented a Bill to amend the Sentencing Code to provide for a minimum sentence for cases of manslaughter which are sexually-motivated.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 November, and to be printed (Bill 59).

ACCESS TO ELECTED OFFICE FUND (REPORT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Daisy Cooper presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament on the merits of reinstating the Access to Elected Office Fund.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 60).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Tim Farron is unable to be present today, so we move to the next Bill on the Order Paper.

COPYRIGHT AND PERFORMERS' RIGHTS (EXTENDED COLLECTIVE LICENSING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Giles Watling presented a Bill to make provision about extended collective licensing in relation to copyright and performers' rights; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 November, and to be printed (Bill 62).

AUTOMATED EXTERNAL DEFIBRILLATORS (PUBLIC ACCESS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Jim Shannon presented a Bill to require the installation of automated external defibrillators in public buildings, sporting facilities, schools, higher education and other education and skills facilities, and facilities that provide care to vulnerable people; and to make associated provision about training and signage.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 9 September, and to be printed (Bill 63).

BRITISH BILL OF RIGHTS AND WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to make provision for an application to the Council of Europe to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights and the introduction of a British Bill of Rights.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 September, and to be printed (Bill 64).

BBC LICENCE FEE (ABOLITION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to abolish the BBC licence fee and make the BBC a subscription service; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 18 November, and to be printed (Bill 65).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE COMMISSION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to create a Business of the House Commission to regulate the timetabling of business in the House of Commons; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 November, and to be printed (Bill 66).

ELECTORAL COMMISSION (ABOLITION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to abolish the Electoral Commission; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 9 December, and to be printed (Bill 67).

GENERAL ELECTION (LEADERS' DEBATES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to set up a commission to make arrangements for debates between leaders of political parties during a General Election; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 January 2023, and to be printed (Bill 68).

HOSPITALS (PARKING CHARGES AND BUSINESS RATES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to prohibit charging for car parking at NHS Hospitals for patients and visitors; to make provision for NHS Hospitals to be exempt from business rates; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 February 2023, and to be printed (Bill 69).

HUMAN TRAFFICKING (CHILD PROTECTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to make provision for the creation of secure safe houses for children that have been subject to human trafficking; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 February 2023, and to be printed (Bill 70).

HUMAN TRAFFICKING (SENTENCING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to make provision about penalties for human trafficking offences.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 71).

PRIME MINISTER (ACCOUNTABILITY TO HOUSE OF COMMONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to impose duties on the Prime Minister relating to accountability to the House of Commons; to require the Prime Minister to be available to answer questions in that House on at least two occasions during a sitting week except in specified circumstances; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 72).

PRIME MINISTER (TEMPORARY REPLACEMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to make provision for the carrying out of the functions of the Prime Minister in the event that a Prime Minister, or a person temporarily carrying out the functions of the Prime Minister, is incapacitated; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 October, and to be printed (Bill 73).

VOTER REGISTRATION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to prohibit persons from being registered to vote in Parliamentary elections at more than one address; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 74).

WORKERS (RIGHTS AND DEFINITION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to make provision about workers' rights; to amend the definition of worker; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 January 2023, and to be printed (Bill 75).

FULL EMPLOYMENT BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to place a duty on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to pursue a policy of full employment; to make associated provision for an employment guarantee scheme for benefit claimants who have been unemployed and looking for work for longer than six months; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 January 2023, and to be printed (Bill 76).

DEVOLUTION (EMPLOYMENT) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to amend the Scotland Act 1998 to grant legislative competence for employment matters to the Scottish Parliament.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 February 2023, and to be printed (Bill 77).

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to amend the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 to make provision about civil liability for breaches of health and safety duties, and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 February 2023, and to be printed (Bill 78).

ASYLUM SEEKERS (ACCOMMODATION EVICTION PROCEDURES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to make provision for asylum seekers to challenge the proportionality of a proposed eviction from accommodation before an independent court or tribunal; to establish asylum seeker accommodation eviction procedures for public authorities; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 January 2023, and to be printed (Bill 79).

DISABILITY BENEFIT ASSESSMENTS (RECORDING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to place a duty on the Secretary of State to ensure that applicants for Disability Benefit are given the option of their eligibility assessment being audio recorded; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 January 2023, and to be printed (Bill 80).

BENEFIT SANCTIONS (WARNINGS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to make provision for warnings to be given to benefit claimants before they are given sanctions; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 81).

UNIVERSAL CREDIT SANCTIONS (ZERO HOURS CONTRACTS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to amend the Welfare Reform Act 2012 to provide that a Universal Credit claimant may not be sanctioned for refusing work on a zero hours contract; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 82).

PARLIAMENTARY AND HEALTH SERVICE OMBUDSMAN (POWERS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to grant powers to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman to identify and investigate systemic problems in the benefits system and make associated recommendations to the Secretary of State; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 9 December, and to be printed (Bill 83).

UNDER-OCCUPANCY PENALTY (REPORT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament on the merits of repealing those provisions of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 which provide for persons to be paid reduced rates of housing benefit or universal credit because their accommodation is deemed to be under-occupied.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 9 December, and to be printed (Bill 84).

ASYLUM SEEKERS (PERMISSION TO WORK) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to make provision for granting permission to work to asylum seekers who have waited six months for a decision on their asylum application; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 October, and to be printed (Bill 85).

HOUSING STANDARDS

(REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to make provision for national minimum standards in accommodation offered to refugees and asylum seekers; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 October, and to be printed (Bill 86).

SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS (HEALTHY EATING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to publish annual calculations of benefit and tax credit rates that would be required for a representative household to afford to buy meals in accordance with the Eatwell Guide to eating healthily; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 November, and to be printed (Bill 87).

EVICCTIONS (UNIVERSAL CREDIT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to place a duty on the Secretary of State to prevent the evictions of Universal Credit claimants in rent arrears; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 88).

MOBILE HOMES ACT 1983 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to amend the Mobile Homes Act 1983; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 October, and to be printed (Bill 89).

MOBILE HOMES (PITCH FEES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to amend the provisions about pitch fees in the Mobile Homes Act 1983; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 18 November, and to be printed (Bill 90).

ANONYMITY OF SUSPECTS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to create an offence of disclosing the identity of a person who is the subject of an investigation in respect of the alleged commission of an offence; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 October, and to be printed (Bill 91).

COVID-19 VACCINE DAMAGE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to establish an independent review of disablement caused by Covid-19 vaccinations and the adequacy of the compensation offered to persons so disabled; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 October, and to be printed (Bill 92).

COVID-19 VACCINE DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to place a duty on the Secretary of State to improve the diagnosis and treatment of persons who have suffered or continue to suffer ill effects from Covid-19 vaccines; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 18 November, and to be printed (Bill 93).

DOMESTIC ENERGY (VALUE ADDED TAX) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to exempt from VAT supplies of electricity, oil and gas for domestic purposes; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 9 September, and to be printed (Bill 94).

PUBLIC HEALTH (CONTROL OF DISEASE) ACT 1984 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to amend the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 to make provision about parliamentary scrutiny of regulations made under that Act; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 February 2023, and to be printed (Bill 95).

CARAVAN SITE LICENSING (EXEMPTIONS OF MOTOR HOMES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to exempt motor homes from caravan site licensing requirements; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 February 2023, and to be printed (Bill 96).

NHS ENGLAND (ALTERNATIVE TREATMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to make provision about arranging alternative non-NHS England treatment for patients who have waited for more than one year for hospital treatment; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 October, and to be printed (Bill 97).

BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION
(PRIVATISATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to make provision for the privatisation of the British Broadcasting Corporation; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 February 2023, and to be printed (Bill 98).

CHILDREN'S CLOTHING (VALUE ADDED TAX) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to extend the definition of children's clothing for the purposes of exemption from VAT; to extend the VAT exemption to further categories of school uniform; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 February 2023, and to be printed (Bill 99).

BBC LICENCE FEE NON-PAYMENT
(DECriminalISATION FOR OVER-75s) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to de-criminalise the non-payment of the BBC licence fee by persons aged over seventy-five; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 9 September, and to be printed (Bill 100).

REGULATORY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to require a Regulatory Impact Assessment to be published for all primary and secondary legislation introduced by the Government; to make provision for associated sanctions; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 101).

BARNETT FORMULA (REPLACEMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to report to Parliament on proposals to replace the Barnett Formula used to calculate adjustments to public expenditure allocated to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with a statutory scheme for the allocation of resources based on an assessment of relative needs; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 9 December, and to be printed (Bill 102).

RULE OF LAW (ENFORCEMENT BY PUBLIC
AUTHORITIES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to require public authorities to exercise their statutory powers to investigate and take enforcement action for breaches of the law; to make provision for sanctions for failing to take such action; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 January 2023, and to be printed (Bill 103).

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION (OFFENCES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to create offences in respect of persons who have entered the UK illegally or who have remained in the UK without legal authority; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 September, and to be printed (Bill 104).

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE CO-FUNDING AND
CO-PAYMENT BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to make provision for co-funding and for the extension of co-payment for NHS services in England; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 18 November, and to be printed (Bill 105).

CARAVAN SITES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to amend the requirements for caravan site licence applications made under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 106).

PUBLIC SECTOR EXIT PAYMENTS (LIMITATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to limit exit payments made by some public sector organisations to employees; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 107).

GREEN BELT (PROTECTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to establish a national register of Green Belt land in England; to restrict the ability of local authorities to de-designate Green Belt land; to make provision about future development of de-designated Green Belt land and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 9 September, and to be printed (Bill 108).

DECARBONISATION AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Caroline Lucas, supported by Clive Lewis, Zarah Sultana, Debbie Abrahams, Wera Hobhouse, Nadia Whittome, Claire Hanna, Stephen Farry and Beth Winter, presented a Bill to place duties on the Secretary of State to decarbonise the United Kingdom economy and to reverse inequality; to establish a ten-year economic and public investment strategy in accordance with those duties which promotes a community- and employee-led transition from high-carbon to low- and zero-carbon industry; to require the Government to report on its adherence to the strategy; to establish higher environmental standards for air, water and green spaces; to make provision to protect and restore natural habitats; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 October, and to be printed (Bill 109).

PARTICIPATION IN COURT PROCEEDINGS (LIVE LINKS)
BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Robbie Moore presented a Bill to make provision about participating in certain court proceedings through live links; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 110).

REMOVAL OF TITLES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Rachael Maskell presented a Bill to give the monarch powers to remove titles; to provide that such removals can be done by the monarch on their own initiative or following a recommendation of a joint committee of Parliament; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 9 December and to be printed (Bill 111).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Owen Thompson is unable to be present today, so we move to the next Bill on the Order Paper.

PATERNITY (LEAVE AND PAY) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Gareth Davies presented a Bill to extend eligibility to paternity leave and pay; to make provision for more flexibility in the timing of, and notice period for, paternity leave; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 September, and to be printed (Bill 114).

EMPLOYMENT (DISMISSAL AND RE-ENGAGEMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Gavin Newlands presented a Bill to make provision for safeguards for workers against dismissal and re-engagement on inferior terms and conditions; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 115).

High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill

Second Reading

5.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Wendy Morton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Today, the House is considering the next stage of HS2—the section from Crewe to Manchester, a route that will bring high-speed rail to the heart of the north for the first time. When this section is completed, HS2 will link the UK's three largest conurbations, Greater Manchester, the west midlands and London. It will double capacity on the UK's busiest rail route, freeing up much-needed space on other congested rail lines. It will halve journey times between Manchester and Birmingham, and it will speed passengers from Manchester Piccadilly to London Euston in just one hour and 11 minutes—a trip that takes over two hours today. By transforming rail travel for millions of people each year and acting as a catalyst for investment, jobs and regeneration, this vital route will honour the Government's defining commitment to levelling up our country.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): My constituency contains a large town called Northwich. Just over a year ago, part of the station collapsed: the roof collapsed. Through the grace of God, nobody died.

As the Minister may well imagine, people are somewhat sceptical about HS2. We see significant investment going into it, while we have a station where those who are disabled cannot go in one direction because they cannot cross a bridge. Will the Minister consider intervening and genuinely levelling up for the people of Northwich, as part of this project?

Wendy Morton: I am aware of that station, but I gently remind the hon. Gentleman that the Government are investing record amounts in conventional rail alongside HS2.

I am sure that the House was as delighted as I was to see the Elizabeth line open last month: a major new artery to meet growing passenger demand in the south-east for decades to come. The Elizabeth line had its beginnings in a hybrid Bill, and it is great to be able to celebrate the fruits of our labours. Today, we push forward again with another Bill for HS2, the third of its kind. This Bill, and what we are delivering for the north and the midlands, is even more ambitious than the Elizabeth line was for London.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I am sure the Minister appreciates that even the Tory leader in the Senedd has now said that we in Wales should receive our fair share of HS2 funding. When will her Government respect this clear and—I emphasise this—cross-party message? Or will they continue to sell Wales short?

Wendy Morton: Perhaps I should gently remind the right hon. Lady that, owing to the way in which the Barnett formula works in spending reviews, the Welsh Government have received a significant uplift in Barnett-based funding as a result of the UK Government's spending on HS2.

[Wendy Morton]

Let me return to the subject of investment. We have a £96 billion integrated rail plan, including Northern Powerhouse Rail, to overhaul infrastructure and services across both regions. This is the largest rail investment ever announced by a UK Government.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Wendy Morton: I will make a little more progress.

This is the biggest upgrade to the north and midlands rail network since the Victorian era, and the Bill is pivotal to the entire plan. Getting HS2 from Crewe to Manchester involves far more than just a 38-mile stretch of the high-speed network. It also provides critical infrastructure for Northern Powerhouse Rail services between Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool, cutting journey times and significantly boosting capacity on east-west routes. For decades, passengers have put up with slow journeys and overcrowding on many routes across the north and the midlands.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Can the Minister tell the House whether she is determined to press ahead with HS2 irrespective of how high the cost goes? Is there a price at which she will say, “Actually, this no longer represents value for money for the taxpayer”, or is she prepared to give HS2 a blank cheque and press on with it irrespective of how much it costs? If she is, I have a house to sell her.

Wendy Morton: I can tell my hon. Friend that there is no blank cheque book. I can also tell him that we are delivering within budget. Thirdly, I know that the Minister for HS2—the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson)—is keeping a very close eye on these matters.

Philip Davies: Can I follow up on that?

Wendy Morton: I am going to continue.

The infrastructure was simply not built for a 21st-century economy. For example, daily passenger journeys in the Greater Manchester region have quadrupled since 1995. This Bill will transform rail capacity into Manchester. There will be extra platforms and extra junctions, making it one of our best connected cities.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I fully understand the reason for improving the high-speed railway between Crewe and Manchester, but at the same time I have great concerns about the environmental impact and particularly the loss of traditional forests and trees. Can the Minister give us some indication of what has been done to retain them, and what has been done to replace them?

Wendy Morton: The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point in raising the environmental impacts. We are keeping negative environmental impacts to an absolute minimum, creating new habitats and planting 7 million new trees in phase 1 alone. It is also fair to say that on the Crewe-to-Manchester phase, we have committed to raise our ambition even further, and we aim to deliver a 10% net gain in biodiversity.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): Will the Minister give way?

Wendy Morton: I want to make some progress, but then I will take some more interventions.

Turning back to HS2 and the north-west, I must mention that this section of HS2 includes a new high-speed station at Manchester Piccadilly and a new high-speed station at Manchester airport, offering the potential to use the airport station to further promote the international airport.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I warmly welcome the Second Reading today and I absolutely agree with the Minister about the crucial importance of integrating HS2 with Northern Powerhouse Rail, which I think is equally as important as, if not even more important than, HS2. But would it not be better to do this properly and have an underground station at Manchester Piccadilly that properly links to Northern Powerhouse Rail and future-proofs the network?

Wendy Morton: On the specific point of a Manchester Piccadilly underground station, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that my Department has been working closely with Greater Manchester stakeholders for a long time to try to understand their reasons for supporting an underground station at Piccadilly. HS2 Ltd has considered these reasons and done extensive investigative work on the feasibility of this option. That work has found that an underground station would cause major city centre disruption during the construction period and significantly delay the opening of services into Manchester by more than seven years. It would also add around an additional £5 billion to the cost of the Crewe-to-Manchester scheme alone. That is an absolutely crazy amount of money to spend on something that is quite frankly worse.

Jeff Smith: Will the Minister give way?

Wendy Morton: I am going to make some progress.

HS2 will truly future-proof travel across the north. It is crucial for local services, regional services, national services and international services.

Sir Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): My hon. Friend mentions the station at Manchester airport, but she must beware that the proposed station is actually a quarter of a mile away from the airport, at Davenport Green. Would it not make far more sense to put the airport station at the airport?

Wendy Morton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. Obviously, a huge amounts of engagement has gone on, and in deciding on the location, extensive optioneering work has also considered connectivity, engineering and environmental matters as well as cost issues. The Manchester airport station is located as close to the airport as possible, given all of those competing factors.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): I welcome the airport connectivity, which is brilliant not only for our domestic rail travel but for those connections that we need with the airport. Would my hon. Friend agree that it is also crucial because we want to welcome investment into the north? What effect does she think this new airport link will have on that?

Wendy Morton: My hon. Friend makes an important point and reminds us of the importance of investment. This investment will bring many new jobs and investments into the area, and that will bring benefits to local communities, local people and local businesses.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Wendy Morton: I am going to make some progress, then I will take more interventions.

This hybrid Bill is the first one to deal with infrastructure in both England and Scotland. The Bill includes a new depot on the west coast main line in Dumfries and Galloway to ensure that HS2 trains can travel to and be maintained in Scotland. The environment will benefit greatly too. Rail is already the greenest form of public transport in this country, and the most sustainable, carbon-efficient way of moving people and goods quickly over long distances. HS2 will bring further significant reductions in emissions, with new trains and modern tracks helping us to move towards a net zero transport system. This Bill is going even further than previous transport hybrid Bills.

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): We welcome the reduction in the greenhouse gas emissions, but phase 2b of HS2 without the Golborne spur will actually increase the greenhouse gas emissions. With the Golborne spur, they would be decreased by 750,000 tonnes. Does the Minister not agree, therefore, that the Golborne link should be further considered?

Wendy Morton: We are looking at alternatives, because it is quite possible that we could come forward with something better. I know this is something that the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle, is looking at very carefully.

The huge economic benefits that HS2 will bring to Scotland are not in question. HS2 services between London and Glasgow are set to be available once the HS2 trains start running on to the conventional rail network. We are also committed to exploring alternatives that deliver similar benefits to the Golborne link within the £96 billion envelope of the integrated rail plan.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): I warmly welcome the Government's decision to scrap the Golborne link. It is a £3 billion white elephant. The opportunity to put HS2 trains into stations such as Warrington is something that I know Warrington Borough Council and the hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) would also welcome. Can the Minister tell us if that is something that HS2 is considering?

Wendy Morton: Within the envelope of the funding, I would like to assure my hon. Friend that we are considering all options.

Going back to the issue of biodiversity, we are aiming to boost biodiversity along the Crewe-to-Manchester route, which will mean greater environmental diversity than existed before construction, thereby continuing HS2's commitment to leave a green legacy. This Bill will contribute not only to a greener economy but to a more skilled economy. In the two years since the construction

of HS2 began between London and Birmingham, significant progress has been made on this milestone project.

I mentioned earlier that this is the third HS2 Bill. It is absolutely incredible to watch the move from the Bills being presented to this House to seeing real spades and tunnel-boring machines in the ground and the unveiling of the staggering 700-tonne bridge-building machine that is set to begin work on a 3.4 km bridge across the Colne Valley. We have also awarded the £2 billion contract for the delivery and maintenance of HS2 trains for phases 1 and 2a, and under budget, I might add.

Jonathan Edwards: Further to the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts), is it not the case under the current constitutional arrangements that every political party in Wales has concerns about HS2's funding? Nearly every single politician in Wales, including Ministers in the Wales Office, have concerns about this issue, yet the British Government can ignore their concerns.

Wendy Morton: We are not ignoring Wales or those concerns. The current plans will see Welsh passengers benefit from the HS2 interchange at Crewe, with shorter journey times to north Wales than are currently possible on the west coast main line. The proposed integrated station at Old Oak Common will be served by HS2, the Elizabeth line and conventional rail, including trains to Wales and the west of England.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that Welsh passengers would benefit even further if the line between Crewe and Chester were electrified?

Wendy Morton: The hon. Gentleman is a passionate campaigner for the electrification of that stretch of railway, and he is nothing if not persistent in using every opportunity to raise that issue.

The state-of-the-art HS2 train fleet, capable of up to 225 mph, will be designed and built by a Hitachi-Alstom joint venture located in Newton Aycliffe, Derby and Crewe. It is a truly national endeavour encompassing three regions, each with a proud engineering pedigree. The construction of HS2 is already supporting more than 26,000 jobs, and there will be many more jobs with the coming of this Bill. There will be more apprenticeships, which is great news as we build a workforce with transferable skills that are fit for the future.

Since the Oakervee review and the notice to proceed for phase 1, this Government have remained, and will continue to remain, relentlessly focused on controlling costs. We will ensure that this ambitious new railway delivers its wealth of benefits at value for money for the taxpayer. HS2 is within budget, and we expect to get the job done within budget.

Andrew Gwynne: I support what the Minister is saying about bringing HS2 in on budget and keeping a tight control on costs, but we also have to get best value for the taxpayer. On the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), the Piccadilly proposals are suboptimal. They will economically damage the growth potential around Piccadilly, and the interrelationship between HS2 and Northern Powerhouse

[Andrew Gwynne]

Rail will be far worse than the Transport for Greater Manchester underground station option. [Interruption.] I see the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson) shaking his head, but Greater Manchester is adamant. We want and need the best option at Piccadilly, and I hope Ministers will think again.

Wendy Morton: The hon. Gentleman's suggestion is a suboptimal option, and I am sure my hon. Friend will have more to say about that. I reiterate that we have been working closely with Greater Manchester stakeholders for a long time, since 2013 I think.

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson) indicated assent.

Wendy Morton: I see my hon. Friend nodding. We have been working closely with Greater Manchester stakeholders since 2013 to understand their reasons for supporting the idea of an underground station at Piccadilly, but I will leave it to him to say more.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): I am grateful to the Minister for being kind in taking a range of interventions.

I observe from their interventions that Opposition Members' mindset might best be characterised as making the perfect the enemy of the good. Does the Minister agree that this £96 billion investment will transform Piccadilly station?

Andrew Gwynne: It won't.

Katherine Fletcher: It doesn't half sound like you are picking holes in it because you want to play politics. This is the best thing for the economy in the north of England.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I will just clear this up. The hon. Lady means to say "he" and not "you."

Katherine Fletcher: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. I meant to say "he."

Wendy Morton: My hon. Friend makes an important point.

Andrew Gwynne: Does she?

Wendy Morton: Will the hon. Gentleman let me continue, instead of getting carried away on the Back Benches? If we were to pursue the underground option, it would result in a more than seven-year delay to the HS2 project reaching Manchester Piccadilly; a cost increase of around £5 billion compared with the surface station; and at least 130,000, but realistically up to 350,000, additional HGV journeys in and out of Manchester over the construction period due to much greater quantities of concrete and steel needing to be imported and surface material needing to be exported from the construction site. I hope the hon. Gentleman agrees that the impact on local residents and businesses would be quite unbearable.

Jeff Smith: Will the Minister give way?

Wendy Morton: I will make some progress.

We are continually improving the design of this railway. This is a hybrid Bill, which means it is both a public Bill and a private Bill. It will have all the normal public Bill stages, but there will be an additional stage in which a specially appointed Select Committee will consider its private aspects.

If this Bill is given a Second Reading, we will commit it to that Select Committee today and, in doing so, ask it to look at the detail of the route and make decisions on the evidence put before it. This process allows for changes to the railway design to take the needs of local communities into account. It also allows for improvements to be made where new information comes to light, which brings me to the Golborne link.

Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con): Of course it is right that mitigations are considered during the Bill's passage. As the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson), will be aware, because he kindly visited Eddisbury earlier this year, there are plans that we hope might be changed during the Bill's passage to build a rolling stock depot, as well as two borrow pits and a significant construction site, in close proximity to Wimboldsley Primary School. The route through Cheshire is also on ground with a complex geological make-up, which will cause difficulties with salt mines and understanding the unknown quantities of salt that still lie beneath the soil. What assurance can the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), give the House and my constituents that these two issues will be properly resolved before shovels go into the ground?

Wendy Morton: I am aware that my hon. Friend the Minister of State recently visited Eddisbury. The Crewe North rolling stock depot will support the scheme's operation, and alternative options for its location were considered and discounted as unsuitable because of their location, size or lack of connection to the existing network.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson) mentions Cheshire's special environmental conditions, including its salt. HS2 Ltd has taken the special geological conditions in this part of Cheshire into account, and the design of the scheme has been informed by a wide range of information, including from British Geological Survey maps and surveys, salt extraction operators and local action groups.

As I said, the Bill will have all the normal public Bill stages and an additional stage for a specially appointed Select Committee to consider its private aspects. If the Bill is given a Second Reading, we will commit it to that Select Committee today. In doing so, we will ask the Select Committee to look at the detail of the route and make decisions on the evidence put before it. This process allows for changes to the railway design to take into account the needs of local communities. It also allows for improvements to be made where new information has come to light, hence my comments about the Golborne link, to which I now wish to move on.

That section of the line runs from a junction at Hoo Green to the west coast main line south of Wigan. Sir Peter Hendy's Union connectivity review made it clear that the Golborne link "does not resolve all" the current constraint issues between Crewe and Preston.

It recommended that we review alternative options for this section of the line. We have therefore announced our intention to remove the Golborne link from this Bill, so that we can get on with the important work of finding the best solution to deliver the most benefits for passengers, while also ensuring value for the taxpayer. HS2 services to Scotland are not in question; they will continue to serve Wigan and Preston, as well as Lancaster, Cumbria and Scotland. The options to be considered are those that could be delivered within the £96 billion integrated rail plan envelope. So whether to remove this section of track from the Bill is a decision for the House here today. There is a motion that instructs the hybrid Bill Select Committee on the scope of the scheme. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that it is important that we take the time to ensure that every aspect of HS2 is right for this country, so I urge them to support that motion while we consider the options, which will allow the Government to get on with bringing HS2, and faster, greener and more reliable train services, to Manchester as soon as we can.

Of course, the way in which the Government engage with those impacted by the construction of HS2 is vital. Those living along the line of the route may see nothing good in this Bill for them, especially where it directly affects their homes or businesses. That is why the Government appointed my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle to be HS2 Minister and why so much hard work is being done to try to reach all of the communities affected. HS2 Ltd has run in-person events in community hubs up and down the route, telling people about the Bill. In fact, an in-person event is taking place right now in Greater Manchester. These events are telling people about the environmental statement that accompanied the Bill and about the property compensation schemes accompanying this railway, which go above and beyond the statutory framework. HS2 Ltd has run webinars online for those not wanting to attend an in-person event. There is a 24/7 helpline available; it is a freephone number and it is open every day of the year. People can email HS2 Ltd with their queries. For those who need extra help, HS2 Ltd can offer one-to-one appointments. I recognise that some will never support the project, but if people cannot get behind the railway itself, perhaps they can get behind some of the legacy benefits it will bring, which I have spoken about at length here today.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): I would be amiss if I did not point out that in my constituency, where HS2 is proposed to go from top to bottom, the experience of consultation, communication and the manner in which it has been handled has been deplorable. My right hon. Friend the late Cheryl Gillan had exactly the same experience in Chesham and Amersham. I strongly recommend that the Minister takes account of the fact that we lost the by-election in very similar circumstances to what will happen elsewhere in other parts of the country as this matter progresses without the degree of consultation that is really required. I have to put that on the record.

Wendy Morton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue this evening. I can understand why he would want to place his views on the record in this debate, but I know that the HS2 Minister is clear that we continue to listen as we go through this process. That is why I was keen to set out the ways in which HS2 Ltd continues to engage.

Today, I am asking the House to support the next major step in building a national high-speed rail network. But the question for us to answer today is not whether this railway should go ahead, it is: how can this project ensure maximum benefits for as many people and as many businesses as possible, long into the future? That is what this Bill will deliver, and that is what I am asking Members to support. The Bill is not only transforming rail services in the north-west and vastly improving the passenger experience, but providing the foundations for new east-west services on the Northern Powerhouse Rail network and levelling up communities across the north and the midlands that have been poorly served by transport for too long. I commend this Bill to the House.

6.15 pm

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): It is an honour and a privilege to open the Second Reading debate on this Bill on behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition. First, let me say that the shadow Transport Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), sends her sincere apologies for not being able to attend today's debate. As the political lead for Wakefield, she has had to make her way back up north, before the Tory rail strikes kick in to add to the misery already faced by Brits when they have to queue at our ports and airports.

Let me restate Labour's support in principle for HS2, which creates quality jobs, boosts UK construction and engineering, and gets people and freight off the motorways, with fewer lorries clogging our towns and polluting the air. HS2 boosts business, from steel to sports; links communities, families, and markets; boosts rail capacity; provides comfort and convenience to passengers; and helps to deliver a 21st-century rail network for the great British public.

Philip Davies: I am going to give the shadow Minister the same opportunity I gave the Minister. Is there a price at which the Opposition would withdraw their support from HS2 or will they support it irrespective of how expensive it becomes? If there is a limit to the price the Opposition are prepared to accept, what is that limit?

Mr Dhesi: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and I would have expected nothing less. One thing he has helped to highlight with his question is that under a Labour Government we would have control of the finances, unlike what we are seeing with the Tory mismanagement, where there is a ballooning budget. I wanted to come on to that and his intervention is timely, because it is thanks to the usual Tory mismanagement that we are all accustomed to that this is already a watered-down offering, betraying millions and letting down communities across towns and cities in the north and midlands. The continued slashing of HS2, which was born under a Labour Government more than a decade ago, means it is becoming merely a ghost of its former self. So from this Front Bench, we simply urge the Prime Minister and his Transport Ministers to deliver on their promises and ensure that HS2 is built on time and in full.

Robert Langan (High Peak) (Con): The hon. Gentleman talks about betraying millions. Is the leader of his party—he voted to block HS2—betraying millions in the north?

Mr Dhesi: As a constituency interest for the Leader of the Opposition, my right hon. and learned Friend voiced his opinion on behalf of his constituents, but I would not be at the Dispatch Box extolling the virtues of HS2 if the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition was not firmly behind this Bill.

This Bill has come at a poignant moment, where the Government's inept management of our railways has come to a head. We have Department for Transport cuts to the tune of 10% on rail alone, tens of thousands of vital train services slashed and a national rail strike looming.

Christian Matheson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; my next-door neighbours in the area around Chester are still battling with Network Rail and Avanti West Coast to get more direct services back on the London to Chester and north Wales line. At the moment, there does not seem to be a definite plan to bring them back. We are hopeful that we might get them by the end of the year. That is surely exactly the point he is making.

Mr Dhesi: My hon. Friend is a doughty champion for his constituents and he has made that point in the House on several occasions when we have faced such significant cuts to services. As a country, we cannot invest in rail if we are in the process, because of this Government, of slashing services, including to Chester.

Sir William Cash: I am listening with great interest to what the hon. Gentleman is saying, as I did to the Minister. On the question of the financing, I happened to be sitting on the train from Euston to the midlands the other day. A gentleman to my left knew who I was and said, "I'm actually involved in the HS2 project." I said, "That's very interesting indeed." Then he said, "By the way, I think you have been complaining about the vast overspend." I said, "Yes, I have." He then said to me, "Well, I know a great deal about it and it won't cost less than £150 billion—you do know that, don't you?" Does the hon. Gentleman—or, for that matter, the Government—understand that this white elephant, such as it is, is costing the British people an arm and a leg and is obsolete already?

Mr Dhesi: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. I hope he has furnished the rail Minister with those figures and that that is not merely an anecdote, because it is important that the cost of the project does not balloon. If whistleblowers are to be believed, the cost is rising. That is why the Labour party has consistently called for the management of the budget, and the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier), has done a great deal of work on that.

When it comes to rail, there is sadly a theme of mismanagement, broken promises and missed opportunities. That prompts the question: what is the point of having major infrastructure projects if the Secretary of State is intent on presiding over the managed decline of our railways?

Let me turn to the national Tory rail strike—*[Interruption.]* I know Conservative Members like that. It is not too late for the Secretary of State for Transport to prevent the national rail strike. We do not want to see strikes. The only people in the country who are frothing

at the mouth with excitement at the prospect of strikes are sitting on the Government Benches, because this is a strike cooked up by the Cabinet and driven by Downing Street. Ministers are relishing the prospect of division—anything to distract and take the focus away from their own incompetence, law breaking and infighting.

The Secretary of State should be picking up the phone and convening talks, not throwing petrol on the fire. If I, as the shadow rail Minister, was able to organise and attend separate meetings with the Network Rail chief executive Andrew Haines in his office last month, and with the RMT general secretary Mick Lynch today, why can the Secretary of State not do likewise?

The Secretary of State's handling of this crisis certainly does not bode well for the successful delivery of the largest infrastructure project in Europe. He seems far more focused on harming industrial relations and gunning for a strike than on showing leadership and doing what is best for passengers, rail workers and the industry, so Members should forgive my cynicism when it comes to the Government's management of this significant project.

Sadly, it seems like the Government are simply not up to the job. They overpromise and underdeliver. For a decade or more, we have been listening to Conservative Transport Secretaries extolling the virtues of HS2 and then renegeing on their pledges. In their 2017 election manifesto, the Conservatives promised to "continue our programme of strategic national investments, including High Speed 2".

Their 2019 manifesto said:

"Now is the time to invest in Northern Powerhouse Rail".

They say one thing before a general election and break their promises as soon as the votes are counted.

The cancellation of the eastern leg of HS2 is indeed a betrayal of the north. Upgrades to Leeds station have been scrapped; a new station at Bradford has been scrapped; electrification from Selby to Hull has been scrapped; and extra capacity on the Cumbrian coast line has been scrapped. What have the Secretary of State and this Government got against the north of England? Spending on transport in the north is half the spending for transport in London, and the Government are cutting Transport for the North's budget by 20%. What an absolute mess.

Christian Matheson: My hon. Friend the shadow Minister talks about the cuts to Transport for the North budgets; is he aware that the Secretary of State refused to see the acting chairwoman of Transport for the North, Councillor Louise Gittins, when she was in post? He declined to have a meeting with her; surely that shows this Government's contempt for transport in the north.

Mr Dhesi: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Such contempt is what is holding our country back, and that is leading to the mismanagement of our network. Indeed, as I said earlier, that is emblematic of this Government, because with the impending rail strikes their behaviour is going to lead to such disruption for hard-working Brits up and down the country.

I can count more than 60 times when Ministers have promised from that Dispatch Box to deliver HS2 in full. Hopes are raised, then dashed. Promises are made, then broken. Why should anyone believe a word they say? And what of addressing the concerns raised about

HS2—on community consultation, as the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) aptly pointed out; on spiralling costs; on ensuring value for money for taxpayers; and on environmental mitigations, as pointed out by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)? It is within the grasp of Ministers to address those concerns today, but I fear we might all be left disappointed.

Andy Carter: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman could answer a straightforward question, because many constituents in Warrington would like to know. Does the Labour party support scrapping the Golborne spur?

Mr Dhesi: As we will discuss later in respect of the amendment, we are in favour of excellent alternative proposals from the Government, because until then we cannot support the scrapping of the Golborne link. We will look in detail at what the Government propose in respect of the link.

As the Bill progresses, Labour is keen to see progress on the northern powerhouse. The Bill must deliver the right infrastructure for the north of England but, rather than levelling-up the country, it could in fact entrench the north-south divide for generations to come. It must deliver a solution for Manchester Piccadilly station that enables a future Labour Government to build Northern Powerhouse Rail to Bradford and Leeds.

Jeff Smith: I am pleased that my hon. Friend has mentioned Manchester Piccadilly. We were told earlier that the extra costs would be £5 million; we do not know that, because the costings have not been published, but even if that is the case, the added extra economic value will get that money back in around 15 years. Yes, there would be more costs and more disruption and delay, but this is a once-in-a-century economic project and we need to get it right. Is that not why the council, the Mayor, the business leaders—everybody in Manchester—supports the underground option for Manchester Piccadilly?

Mr Dhesi: My hon. Friend has been a firm champion on behalf of his constituents. His views are also echoed by my good friend, the Mayor of Manchester, Andy Burnham, with whom I have discussed this project. Many are exasperated by the Government's lack of ambition for Manchester and the north, which is why Labour is very much in favour of this. We need a solution for Manchester Piccadilly station that enables a future Labour Government to pick up the pieces and to deliver that Northern Powerhouse Rail in full to Bradford and Leeds.

Robert Largan: The hon. Gentleman is being most generous. As much as I enjoy being lectured about the north by the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), I know that this Government are putting £96 billion of integrated rail investment into the north and the midlands, compared with pretty much nothing from the last Labour Government.

Let me return to the point the hon. Gentleman made earlier about the leader of his party having a constituency interest. I find it remarkable that he suggests that if something were inconvenient for a small area of north London, the leader of his party would side with that ahead of the north and the midlands.

Mr Dhesi: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is pleased to be lectured by the hon. Member for Slough when it comes to standing up for the north. Indeed, it often seems the case that the hon. Member for Slough stands up more for the constituents of the north than Government Ministers. That is why the hon. Gentleman is so happy. Moreover, it was the previous Labour Government who stood up for the people of the north, with amazing investment not just in our rolling stock, but in the west coast main line—billions of pounds of investment for our northern communities.

It is also important to highlight the fact that Labour is keen to see the Government addressing the rail capacity constraints on the west coast main line, allowing for improved connections to Scotland from the north of England. If the Golborne link, which has been mentioned umpteen times, is not taken forward, any funding saved should be reinvested in local transport projects in the north. Labour will fight to ensure that working people across our country see the benefit of this project in jobs and opportunities. Labour wants to ensure that more public contracts go to British companies, big and small, through our plan to buy, make, and sell more here in Britain. That would boost economic growth, create jobs, and open markets, linking neglected regions and towns to help us meet net zero.

That is why the next Labour Government will complete HS2 in full, including the eastern leg and Northern Powerhouse Rail. We will connect 13 million people across our great northern towns and cities, from coast to coast, and set up an office for value for money to oversee spending on major projects and make sure that they do not run out of control. Ministers must get a grip.

Andy Carter: I just want to be clear about this, because I do not think that I quite got an answer to my previous intervention. The hon. Member has just said again that Labour will complete HS2 in full. Does that include the Golborne spur?

Mr Dhesi: As I have already said, Labour believes in delivering HS2 in full. On the Golborne link, we have said that we want that connection to happen, but the Government have said that they will put forward alternative proposals to make sure that that connection is made. We are waiting for those alternative proposals, so that we can make sure that those communities are connected in that part of the country.

As my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor has said, we will “buy, make and sell” in Britain. Let me take UK steel as an example. We would support jobs in UK steel and along the whole of the UK supply chain. Why will this Government not commit to buying UK steel and to supporting the 33,000 jobs in our excellent steel industry? Perhaps the Minister would like to give way now, because I know that the Government would very much like to support the steel industry at this time and commit to buying UK steel—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps not then. HS2 is not only about increased capacity, faster journeys, new stations, more jobs, more apprentices, and a boost for struggling British businesses, but about helping us to deliver net zero.

For decades, rail has produced by far the lowest carbon footprint, compared with cars, coaches and flights. We want national roll-out of electrification. HS2 will use net zero carbon energy from day one, and, as a whole, it will be operationally net zero by 2035.

[Mr Dhesi]

In conclusion, we all want to see our railways thrive. We want them to be accessible, affordable and green. We need them to connect us all, from villages to towns to cities. We should be striving for a world where the best way to travel is by rail. What we cannot do is to allow the poor leadership of this Government to dampen those ambitions for our country. Time and again, the Tories have proven that they are incapable of delivering on rail and have brought chaos to our network. It is time that they got their act together and delivered for our country.

6.35 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): The hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) had the brass neck to refer to this strike as a Tory rail strike. I have never seen a rail strike more inspired by the Labour party than any other policy that I have heard of in the last generation.

The Minister will be very well aware of my long-standing reservations about HS2—I have made my point on this already today—and of why I am convinced that the project, as currently proposed, has no chance of achieving the objectives that the Government have set for it in terms of creating improved rail connectivity, increased capacity on the west coast main line, real economic prosperity and value for the many billions of pounds being spent on it.

I am also profoundly disturbed and deeply disappointed that the Government have failed to revisit the collapsing economic case for this project in the light of changing travelling and working practices following the covid pandemic, and to cancel the HS2 project, or at least everything north of Birmingham, in favour of targeting public transport investment to the areas of the country that really need it. Only yesterday, I heard the Secretary of State say, in relation to this rail strike, that fewer people will be using rail because of the amount time that is spent on Zoom calls and because of the changes in business practices. That is an important and relevant point.

I am also dismayed about the haste at which the Phase 2b Bill is being brought before the House for its Second Reading, especially as it has only just been announced that the project will be subject to 20 substantive amendments, including the removal of the Golborne link. My concern is that these changes should be the subject of formal consultation. The public are entitled to be granted sufficient time to formally respond in writing before Second Reading and before the formal petitioning process begins.

I ask the Minister to take the opportunity of making better use of the public investment given to the HS2 project by ensuring that the company responsible for it, together with his departmental officials, adopt the best possible and most cost-effective engineering design solutions for the project. Sadly, from experience, I know that that is not proving to be the case, as HS2 management and Department for Transport officials seem unwilling to fulfil the commitments that the Minister has made to me and my constituents. They are therefore frustrating the promised independent and impartial review of our proposals for an alternative railhead and maintenance base to replace the unworkable and calamitous proposals that HS2 seems hell-bent on imposing on Stone, my constituency, and nearby communities.

Incontrovertible evidence has been compiled by my constituents to demonstrate that their alternative solution would remove tens of thousands of HS2's construction lorries from the local road network in Staffordshire, North Shropshire and Cheshire, while also eliminating any need to construct the Ashley railhead and the two proposed Phase 2b maintenance facilities at Ashley and the Crewe North rolling stock depot. Not only would my constituents' proposals save £650 million of public money, but, were less than half of that sum to be reinvested in the reopening of an eight-mile section of the North Staffordshire railway between the west coast main line and Stoke station, it would create the best and most cost-effective levelling-up opportunity in the country.

With the Government now having confirmed their decision to remove the Golborne link from a phase 2 hybrid Bill, the capacity on the west coast main line through and to the north of Crewe station will be significantly reduced. As a consequence, phase 2b will achieve the precise opposite of what is intended. The public therefore ask, "What is the point of phase 2b?". I have much sympathy with such viewpoints, as do my Cheshire colleagues, whose constituents' lives will be so blighted by this project.

However, if the Government remain determined to continue with this expensive folly, let us at least get something positive out of it. The only way to do that is to ensure that Crewe station gets the full upgrade it requires to overcome the capacity constraints that will be imposed on it and on the west coast main line by HS2. That will require new platforms to be constructed on the independent lines on the western side of the station.

Combined with the reopening of the North Staffordshire railway, the improvements at Crewe station would for the first time enable multiple train services to cross the west coast main line and enable services from north Wales and the north-west to connect to north Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and thereafter to link to the east midlands, Yorkshire, East Anglia and the east coast. Such a bold plan would put a huge part of the population of the north of England in direct rail contact with four international airports and create a direct freight line between Liverpool and several east coast ports, while putting both Crewe and the Potteries at the centre of this new transport and economic activity.

Finally, the Minister knows that he has an open invitation to visit my constituency and meet me and my constituents. I urge him to take up that offer as soon as possible so that we can demonstrate to him first-hand how our proposals will provide the unique short, medium and long-term levelling-up benefits that the population of my own and many other constituencies so richly deserve.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the SNP spokesperson.

6.42 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Let me first say that we on the SNP Benches and my colleagues in the Scottish Government support HS2, such as it is. We support anything that increases capacity on our rail network and improves the prospects of driving up modal shift for journeys between Scotland and the rest of the UK and Europe, whether for passengers or for freight.

The UK has lagged hugely behind comparable European countries for years—decades, in fact—in rolling out modern, technically advanced high-speed rail networks, but rather than dwell on how late Britain has come to the party, let us welcome the fact that it has turned up at all. I, too, welcome the plans by HS2 to locate a depot at Annandale, creating jobs in the southwest and border regions.

However, as always with this Government, it is not the headlines that give the picture; it is the small print and the details that tell the real story of what their priorities are. We saw that the other week, as has been mentioned several times already, with the cancellation of the Golborne link. We have been told time after time that HS2 would deliver transformational change on our cross-border railways. HS2's website boasts:

“HS2 will re-balance the country”,

while the UK Government tell us that Scotland will,

“receive the best possible HS2 service”.

In reality, now that Golborne has been chucked in the bin, no doubt we can expect another bargain basement bodge job, designed to keep the Tory Back-Benchers happy rather than provide real investment in our transport infrastructure.

Scotland has been told for years that the rationale under which we will benefit from HS2 is reduced journey times and increased capacity. We support HS2 on that basis. Now we are told—or rather an announcement is whispered elsewhere on the day of the Tory leadership boorach—that a crucial connection between the classic network and the high-speed network is to be scrapped, with any prospect of an alternative link delayed indefinitely.

The Government's own Union Connectivity Review, which has already been mentioned, said plainly,

“Further work is needed to determine the...benefits, costs and deliverability of an alternative connection”.

Or, in other words, “We haven't a clue how, where and when an alternative to Golborne will be delivered, other than pointing vaguely towards Preston on a map and promising, it will definitely, positively, absolutely be built there—honest.”

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): I agree with the point the hon. Gentleman is making, but can he clarify the SNP's position? Is the party in favour of having high-speed lines on both the east and west side of the country, to Edinburgh and Glasgow?

Gavin Newlands: We were in favour of phase 2b's being constructed all the way to Leeds, which would allow for that development of twin-tracking high-speed lines to the border, but that has been cancelled. The Scottish Government have long supported HS2 and has a memorandum of understanding with the Government for HS2 to be delivered to Scotland, massively improving journey times and helping to drive the modal shift I have spoken about previously.

The decision to cancel the link highlights once again that the UK Government cannot be trusted to lead on levelling up, especially when it comes to Scotland. The move has met near-unanimous objections—despite the protestations of the hon. Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter)—especially from the rail industry.

A combined statement from the Railway Industry Association, the Rail Freight Group, and the High Speed Rail Group said:

“It is hugely disappointing to discover that, on a day when much political attention was focused elsewhere, the Government confirmed that the ‘Golborne Link’ is to be removed from the HS2 project.

Only six months ago, the Golborne Link was included in the Integrated Rail Plan, as well as the HS2 Phase 2b Bill. The Link has been provided for in the budget for HS2 and is needed to allow adequate capacity on the national rail network to fulfil its vital function of handling the nation's longer distance movements of both passengers and freight. Without this connection, a bottleneck will be created north of Crewe on the West Coast Main Line, which in turn will negatively impact outcomes for passengers, decarbonisation and levelling up.”

The statement went on:

“Such an important, strategic question of how HS2 services connect into Scotland cannot be left open or uncertain.”

The move has been seen as a cynical betrayal of Scottish interests, aimed at placating Tory voters and MPs at the expense of Scots. With levelling-up funds disproportionately invested in Tory seats, a Tory cost of living crisis undermining any possible progress, a Prime Minister who cannot even be bothered to turn up to his own party's levelling-up conference and now key levelling-up projects cancelled on a whim, this Tory Government cannot be trusted to deliver levelling up. While the UK Government continue to withhold and abuse money that is meant to replace EU funding, Scotland will continue to be undermined by a Tory Government without integrity, honesty, or a plan.

If the UK Government do not want to spend the money needed to properly link up HS2 with the classic network, they should give the money to the Scottish Government, who can do something real and tangible with it. With electrification costs in Scotland less than two thirds, and an aim to get to nearly half, of those in England, Transport Scotland will get a bigger bang for its buck, and ultimately at zero extra cost to the UK, as until two weeks ago it planned to spend the money anyway.

That £3 billion of extra funding for Scotland's Parliament to spend on Scotland's transport network would be welcomed by a Government who have been matching big ambition with action, whether on rail electrification, zero emission vehicles or active travel spending that is nearly eight times that of England. The benefits of HS2 will be substantially reduced if, at the end of a Rolls-Royce service through HS2, the rest of the rail network is a clapped-out banger.

Thankfully, in Scotland we have invested in both electrification and new rolling stock, meaning that HS2 arrivals in Glasgow and Edinburgh—should they ever get there—will be met with modern railways. Sadly, the same cannot be said for the north of England, which is again at the back of the queue when it comes to improving the railway that the majority of people will continue to use, and where cities such as Leeds and Bradford are still left in the sidings of what should be a 21st century railway.

I also want to mention Wales, since the Treasury has magically created a railway line serving Wales that has not a single inch of track in Wales—I hope the Ordnance Survey have been notified of the Government's ground-breaking cartography. Scotland and Northern Ireland

[Gavin Newlands]

will receive Barnett consequential from HS2 expenditure, as they should, but Wales has been told that HS2 is a joint England and Wales enterprise, despite its being entirely in England, and that not a penny of consequential spending will find its way to Cardiff Bay.

That consequential funding could be invested in one of the Welsh Government's priorities, like the South Wales Metro or even the Cardiff to Swansea electrification previously binned by the Westminster Government. Instead the Senedd will get nothing. Even the Welsh Affairs Committee, which has an inbuilt Tory majority, called for Barnett to be applied to HS2 to give Wales the fair funding it should receive. The progress of this Bill is an opportunity for the Treasury to think again, do the right thing and ensure Wales gets the money it deserves.

Christian Matheson: The hon. Gentleman has talked about the South Wales Metro and the south Wales main line, but he has not mentioned the north Wales main line, which could easily also be electrified, particularly if it was connected to an electrified line from Crewe to Chester.

Gavin Newlands: I did not mention it because I knew that the hon. Gentleman would intervene and mention it for me. I wholeheartedly agree with the point that he makes.

Just as Scotland and, in particular, Wales have been short-changed by this Government, so has the north of England. Leeds and Bradford were cut out of HS2, affecting potential services across the east coast. It is shameful that this Bill is going ahead without the equivalent scheme for Yorkshire and the north-east of England. The previously vaunted Y-shaped HS2 network now seems more like a V sign to millions of people in communities who would have been connected to the new network but who, like Scotland and Wales, will rely on crumbs from the UK's table and vague promises of future improvements.

We need to talk about the rather grubby and suspicious timing of this announcement, which came just minutes before the confidence vote on the Prime Minister on 6 June. Given that we hear that levelling-up funding was promised as sweeteners for support in that confidence vote, it is not beyond reason to question whether there is a link between the last-minute cancellation and the vote. The DFT has claimed that the timing of the announcement with the confidence vote on the Prime Minister was purely coincidental, but this Government have shown themselves to have such a casual relationship with integrity and honesty, is it any wonder that the public openly question whether such claims can be trusted?

Despite concocted complaints that the Scottish Government do not co-operate on transport connectivity, the Tories did not even bother discussing cutting the Golborne link with Scottish Ministers before acting. Transport is a devolved matter. The Scottish Government should not just be consulted; Scottish Ministers must give their consent to any projects relating to devolved matters. Despite this, the UK Government's decision to cancel the Golborne link was unilateral and made without so much as a by-your-leave to the Scottish Government. The UK Government claim that they are working with

the Scottish Government on alternatives, but in reality they have shown an utter disregard for the Scottish Government in this process. Scottish Ministers had already aired concerns about the Bill that thus far have gone unanswered, so this latest unilateral move proves beyond doubt that this Government have no intention to respect the Scottish Government on transport issues.

Notwithstanding the fact that this Government have long since abandoned the concept of honouring the Sewel convention, this Bill requires legislative consent from the Scottish Parliament. It is absolutely right that the Scottish Parliament considers in detail the implications around legislative consent resulting from the Bill. The Cabinet Secretary, Michael Matheson, has recommended that consent be given at this time to a number of clauses, but not all clauses, pending further policy discussions. The devolved issues that the Bill seeks to amend that we see as overreach are the water environment in clause 28, building standards in clause 29 and schedule 22, Crown land and the Scottish Crown estate in clauses 51 and 54, and roads and roadworks provisions in schedule 24. Depending on the outcome of any discussions with the Scottish Government in the coming weeks, we may look to amend the Bill on these matters, in addition to the removal of the Golborne link at later stages of the Bill.

The Tories' mismanagement of rail infrastructure and labour relations highlights the need for Scotland to take full control of its rail network. While Scotland is tied to the UK rail system it will continue to suffer the consequences of UK Government misrule. The Scottish Government's processes for identifying transport investment priorities are not undertaken in isolation and are in place to allow assessment of cross-Government spending priorities across a whole host of other portfolios. Transport infrastructure investment should focus on projects that improve lives, boost our economy, support communities, and work towards net zero. That is how the Scottish Government are planning Scotland's future transport infrastructure investment, and they are doing so through the second strategic transport projects review, not the Union connectivity review or any other UK Government plan that does not align with Scotland's interests.

Since 2007, the Scottish Government has invested more than £9 billion in rail infrastructure in Scotland. Since 2009, the communities of Alloa, Laurencekirk, Armadale, Blackridge, Caldercruix, Conon Bridge, Shawfair, Eskbank, Newtongrange, Gorebridge, Stow, Galashiels, Tweedbank and Kintore have been reconnected to the rail network through a reversal of Beeching cuts and other historic closures. In the next three years, Reston, East Linton, Dalcross, Cameron Bridge and Leven will follow. The SNP is working hard to create a rail service for the 21st century, but meanwhile the UK Government are bungling infrastructure projects, stoking industrial disputes with unions, and proving definitively that the Union cannot and will not deliver for Scotland.

We support HS2 because all of us across these isles have a shared interest in improving connectivity and doing everything possible to drive decarbonisation and the transition to net zero. Renewing existing railway lines and building new ones must be a key part of that ambition, just as it is in Scotland, but the limits of the UK's ambition are contained through this Bill. We will seek to push those on the Government Benches to extend that ambition before Royal Assent and to demonstrate how they intend to level up the huge swathes of this

island who will feel little or no benefit from HS2. It is incumbent on the Government to explain what else they are doing to integrate HS2 into the wider transport network and how they intend to do that over the course of this Bill's passage.

6.54 pm

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): I rise to oppose the Bill, which is highly contentious, especially for my constituents in Tatton. The Minister will be well aware of my long-standing opposition to this white elephant. In fact, it will come as no surprise when I say that I would like nothing more than for this project to be consigned to the history books where it belongs. It was conceived by the Labour lord, Lord Adonis, back in 2004, which is so long ago to a world that has moved on significantly. Since covid and lockdown, people no longer need to travel hundreds of miles for a meeting when they can do it online, saving both money and time.

HS2 has had a bumpy ride. What was the justification? What was its purpose? When it was devised in 2004, it was about an alternative to airport expansion; it was to connect regional airports to Heathrow. When that case fell, it became all about speed—hence High Speed 2. In fact, in Tatton it is now known as “Low Speed, High Cost”. When that reason fell, it was all about capacity; capacity was what we needed. Now it seems to have moved on from that to job creation. As one business case falls, another is seized on. If it is about job creation, I remind the Minister that we have 1.3 million job vacancies in this country at the moment. Where will we get that workforce from? Let us hear no more justifications for this project. What we need instead is reliable, digital infrastructure and 1 gigabit capability—which would benefit everyone, everywhere—along with better local transport links and an east-west line across the north of England. That would do significantly more for the levelling-up agenda than this out-of-date project.

As a constituent wrote to me only the other week when I asked a question at Prime Minister's questions—he wrote to me and the Prime Minister—HS2 is nothing other than “political virtue signalling” and it has totally lost its cause and purpose. If something costed at £150 billion has such a great business case, can we have sight of that business case? The cost is breath taking. In reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), the Minister said that she and fellow Ministers were keeping a close eye on cost, so let me remind them that the cost, which started off as £37.5 billion, is now up to £150 billion and continues to rise. I am not sure how closely their eyes are on that cost.

Philip Davies: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for highlighting my intervention on the Minister. Does she agree that given that the Minister said in her opening remarks that there was not a blank cheque for HS2, it would be helpful if the Minister who winds up told us what the cost of HS2 would have to reach before the Government scrap it altogether?

Esther McVey: I agree with my hon. Friend. With the pressures on steel and raw materials and rising inflation, the cost is set to soar further. I reiterate his question: is there a price at which HS2 is no longer seen as value for money by the Government, or are they prepared to build it irrespective of cost? If that is the case, for Conservatives who believe in value for money, it is an unjustifiable extravagance and a waste of taxpayers' money.

A recent petition saw 155,000 people calling for HS2 to be scrapped, and more than 2,000 of the signatories were from across Tatton—the highest number from any constituency opposing phase 2b of the line. I must pay tribute to the excellent work of people and groups in Tatton, including Ashley parish council, Lach Dennis and Lostock Green parish council, Mid Cheshire Against HS2 and geologist Ros Todhunter. They have worked tirelessly to unearth the shortcomings of HS2 with regard to the fundamental concept of the line and its business case.

Ros Todhunter is an expert in her field and made clear the impact that the line will have on the area, given its complex geography. She has provided Ministers and HS2 with high-level technical reports that explain some of the real difficulties that such a line would pose for the area and for the project; the land is unstable with sinkholes and salt mines, yet the Government continue to push ahead.

The line will cause huge devastation across Cheshire, as documented by Mid Cheshire Against HS2, which has described it as a running scar from Crewe to Manchester. It has calculated that, across Cheshire, HS2 will irreparably damage five internationally protected wildlife sites, 639 local wildlife sites, 108 ancient woodlands and 33 legally protected scientific sites. Although the Minister talks about new trees being planted, I am sure that we can all see the difference between saplings and ancient woodland.

We need to dispel the myth that the Department is touting some kind of carbon zero travel of the future. Its figures show that only 1% of travellers will switch from planes to rail, and only 4% will switch from cars to rail, yet the construction of the line alone will add 1.5 million tonnes of carbon to the atmosphere and HS2 will still produce a net increase in carbon emissions 120 years on. I was also curious about how much energy will be needed to power HS2. A former National Grid electrical engineer told me that the power needed per year would be a third of what Hinkley Point produces. As we have all become aware of energy, its cost and where we will get it from, Ministers should pause and think about that.

I must also mention the suffering that many constituents have faced—some have been dealing with this for 12 years. Their properties have been and remain under threat. Many will be hugely affected but do not qualify for any compensation. They have nowhere to move to and they cannot sell their homes. Other constituents have been in conversation with HS2 to try to negotiate terms for their property or for mitigating issues, but I am afraid that they have got nowhere. They describe it as like talking to a brick wall. HS2 Ltd has been a particularly difficult organisation for people to engage with, as the Prime Minister acknowledged in February 2020 when he suggested that it would not be the delivery body for phase 2b. Here we are today, however: it is still representing, so my constituents are still dealing with it and suffering.

For many of us, this trainline has run out of track. The best thing for the project would be to put it out of its misery and scrap it altogether, but if the Government are determined to press on regardless, there are certain things that absolutely need to be done for my constituency and my constituents. As has been mentioned, my constituents need to know the exact location of Manchester airport station, its construction, whether it will be adequately sized and how accessible it will be—will we be able to

[*Esther McVey*]

get there on the mid-Cheshire lines or via the Altrincham Metrolink? Can we make sure that we do not lose the Wilmslow to Euston line that serves people well at the moment? The mid-Cheshire rail line also needs to be put into a cutting.

There is also a question about whether the infrastructure maintenance bases are in the right place and whether suitable consideration has been given to them. Ashley parish council makes it clear that there is no justification for locating a large, incongruous, permanent industrial facility in the heart of a rural community, especially when its function could be more appropriately carried out from Aldersley Rough, which would maintain the entire western leg of HS2 in perpetuity without any need for satellite infrastructure maintenance bases at Ashley or Crewe.

Thought has not been given to how parts of Tatton will be isolated, and I bet that is true for other rural areas too. One example is the planned closure and diversion of Ashley Road—a busy and important road that connects Ashley to Knutsford and the wider rural area. It is regularly used by emergency service vehicles, with people travelling to Manchester airport and Wythenshawe Hospital, but that will be significantly affected with everyone driving through Mobberley.

There is also the construction of a viaduct crossing of the A556 at the Lostock Gralam triangle, which will cut a swathe through Winnington wood and destroy 30% of ancient woodland. We have no information from HS2 on the proposed embankment, but a width at ground level of over 100 metres suggests that it will go up to 30 metres high, which equates to almost the height of Stockport viaduct or more than six double-decker buses.

Ministers should give a thought to the residents of Ascol Drive—I will highlight only one road—who will be subjected to 10 years of noise, dust and light pollution from the main construction compound sited on the field to the south of their road. That will affect them for some time to come, as well as affecting yet another site of special scientific interest.

The land-grab is significant too, and residents cannot understand how the information keeps changing so significantly. The land-grab between the Morrisons roundabout and the Lostock triangle is 150% greater on January 2022 maps than in the October 2018 working draft.

Those are just some of the issues. If I were to relay all of them, we would be here for some time. If that is true of Tatton, it must be true across the country for other places. I want to stand up for those people who are going to be significantly affected at an astronomical cost. It is time that we brought this project to an end. We cannot just keep throwing money at it or giving it another purpose, justification or reason for being. It is time for a Conservative Government to say, “Enough is enough—HS2 must be scrapped.”

7.7 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Tatton (*Esther McVey*). Although I disagree with her analysis of HS2, she is absolutely right to raise her constituents' concerns here on the Floor of the House of Commons.

I hope that Ministers will listen to some of her constructive suggestions. I hope that HS2 goes forward, but with amendments that mean that the communities affected by the line's construction get something in return.

I do not consider HS2 to be an out-of-date project. France and Germany have high speed rail; high speed rail is about the future and what country we want to be, and about improving the links between all regions and nations of the United Kingdom. For me, it is not about speed; it is precisely about ensuring that we have adequate rail capacity on the network. Speed happens to be a bonus of building a railway line to 21st-century standards, rather than to 19th-century standards, which nobody in their right mind would do with an infrastructure scheme such as the one proposed.

HS2 will also free up local transport slots on key parts of the current rail network. From my campaign to get more than one train a week on the Stockport to Stalybridge line, which is now part of a Restoring Your Railway study, I know that part of the issue is the crossover from that line on to the west coast main line to access slots at Stockport station. That is impossible at the moment because there are three trains an hour from Manchester to Euston, which take up a lot of the slots that would cross over at Heaton Norris junction. HS2 and a change of the configuration around Manchester would free up a lot of slots coming into and out of Stockport station. It also creates more capacity for freight, which we should also be supporting.

Yes, HS2 creates jobs and brings economic development, which is the bonus of a massive economic infrastructure scheme, but it also creates long-term jobs with the economic development that it brings along the route. That is why I passionately want the Government to get this scheme right—to get it right for the country, but, given my own personal self-interest as a Greater Manchester MP, to get it right for my city region as well.

This is a once-in-a-century opportunity to massively improve the accessibility to Greater Manchester, through Greater Manchester and around Greater Manchester, and I welcome such an opportunity. That is why I really urge the Minister to look again at the issue of Piccadilly station. I know the argument she put forward following the interventions made earlier, and I get that, but the fact is that Piccadilly, if we get this right, will have a huge growth opportunity for Manchester, both in connectivity and economic development in that part of the city centre.

I am really concerned about the blight that the Piccadilly station, as currently proposed, will inflict on the approach into Piccadilly. As the Minister will know, the proposal is to bring the tracks out of the ground near Ardwick and into the new Piccadilly station with a concrete platform on stilts. That will blight about half a million square metres of city centre land, and restrict the economic development around the south of Piccadilly. That is a travesty. Worse than that, it will create the situation that, almost from day one, the new Piccadilly station will be at capacity. If we are planning for the next century, let us get the infrastructure right for the next century, and that means getting Piccadilly station right.

We also have to have better connectivity between Metrolink, HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail—I hope with Northern Powerhouse Rail in its fullest design at some stage in the future. That does mean having the

connectivity of the through route under Piccadilly station. Without it, I think the opportunities for Manchester would be greatly missed.

Christian Matheson: My hon. Friend is giving a fantastic exposition of the effects in Manchester, but does he agree that this is largely a regional issue as well? I cannot get more trains to Manchester for my constituents because of the congestion that exists, particularly around Manchester Piccadilly and on the line through Castlefield. If he is talking about more capacity, that would also benefit my constituents.

Andrew Gwynne: Oh, it absolutely would. We are in a Second Reading debate on HS2 and I appreciate that we can veer away from the subject, so it is very tempting to go into a rant about the lack of capacity through Deansgate, Oxford Road and into the current Piccadilly station. That is a huge issue that this does not resolve.

However, what will be resolved is that some of the east-west links, if they can be tunnelled under Manchester into the new Piccadilly station and beyond into Yorkshire, will free up some capacity in the rail network around Manchester, although it does not fundamentally solve the problem between Deansgate and the existing Piccadilly station, despite lots of promises we have had over a very long period of time that we would increase capacity through the Piccadilly corridor.

Graham Stringer: On my hon. Friend's final point, only platforms 15 and 16 at Piccadilly will deal with that issue. On the major thrust of his arguments, he will not be surprised to know that I agree with him. We are often told by Ministers about the success of the regeneration at King's Cross, where the land next to King's Cross was used to bring enormous economic benefits to that part of London. Does he agree that what is happening at Manchester Piccadilly is that Manchester is being denied those benefits because of blight caused by ill-thought-through proposals?

Andrew Gwynne: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I will let the House know that we both went on a walk around Piccadilly, with Transport for Greater Manchester officers and combined authority officers, to have a look at what is being proposed and what could be developed there—indeed, the hon. Member for High Peak (Robert Largan) attended the tour as well—and the tour was illuminating.

For a start, keeping the ugly monstrosity of Gateway House on Station Approach in its place means that when people come out of the new Piccadilly station, as proposed by the Government and HS2, they will be at the delivery bay of Greggs. It is just not the welcome we want for Manchester. It is not even the shopfront of Greggs; it is the back door, with the bins and the ovens. Let us have a bit of vision here, and let us free up the front. Let us have a nice piazza, and a nice welcome to Manchester.

More than that, let us get the economic development in place behind Piccadilly station, and do not just take my word for it. Business leaders in the *Financial Times* today are urging Ministers to revise what they call—not my words—a “hugely shortsighted” design. They say—not me—that the economic development around Piccadilly would bring in the equivalent of £333 million a year of

additional economic benefit if we get this right. That is why I do say to Ministers: let us look again at getting a better solution for Manchester and a better solution for the north to Piccadilly station.

Katherine Fletcher: I have spent many an hour in the environs of Piccadilly station that the hon. Member mentions. Can he remind the House which political party was in control when that socialist concrete monstrosity was constructed, and can he also remind the House what powers the current Labour Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, has over streetscaping and investment in the town centre?

Andrew Gwynne: I would caution the hon. Lady about making a silly political point, because I think Gateway House was probably built in the late 1960s. I certainly know that, for a period of time before local government reorganisation, Manchester City Council was actually a Conservative-controlled council, so she may well find that Gateway House was built under her party's watch, if she is not too careful. *[Interruption.]* As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer), who was the leader of Manchester City Council for a very long time, says, for four years Manchester, in the 1960s, was indeed a Conservative council. That is a silly point about a building built over 40 or 50 years ago, but it needs to go.

Robert Largan: I think the hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech. The point about having a lovely piazza and welcoming people into Manchester is a very good one. Would he agree with me that we also want to see long-awaited improvements at Piccadilly Gardens? We would love to see Manchester City Council pull its finger out and sort out what really lets down my home city. It is an amazing city, and if that is fixed as well, it could make the welcome to Manchester even better.

Andrew Gwynne: Again, I am straying far off the issue of High Speed 2, but I actually agree with the hon. Gentleman. I think the current Piccadilly Gardens do nothing to enhance the vision of Manchester, and—as a small-c conservative, I suppose—I would actually like to go back to the old sunken gardens with flowers, as we used to have in those pictures Lowry painted, but we are where we are. Absolutely, I want to see Piccadilly being the gateway to the great city of Manchester, with the kind of street scene we are now seeing around Albert Square and the town hall, which is absolutely what can be done with really good streetscaping and landscaping.

To return to HS2, as I say, business leaders in the *FT* do not accept the £4 billion extra cost that HS2 has put in. Look, I was a local councillor, so I know what officers do when they do not want to do something—they give you a million and one reasons why you cannot do it rather than one reason why you should—and I am sure that it is the same with civil servants and those in the Department for Transport. They will give Ministers a million and one reasons why they should not do the right thing by Manchester. We need someone to stand up to them and say, “Think again. There is a better way forwards.”

I turn to one of the unintended consequences of HS2's construction. It would be remiss of me not to mention the closure of the Ashton-under-Lyne Metrolink

[*Andrew Gwynne*]

line for a period of at least two years while HS2 is developed around Piccadilly. For those who are not aware, that Metrolink line is an essential piece of transport infrastructure for people right across Tameside. It connects communities from Ashton-under-Lyne through to Audenshaw in my constituency, east Manchester and right into Piccadilly, where it connects with the rest of the Metrolink network through the city centre to Eccles via MediaCityUK. It provides transport links to the 60,000-capacity Etihad stadium at Sportcity and the massive Co-op Live arena currently being built at the Etihad campus.

I find it unacceptable that the Bill plans to mothball the Ashton line and fob off residents with replacement bus services. The Ashton New Road route is already well served by double-decker buses, and people who want to use buses are using them. The beauty of the Metrolink system is that it has attracted people who would not use buses out of their cars and on to public transport, and my fear is that they will go back into their motor cars for the period when the line is mothballed.

I will give a logistical argument. Three double-decker buses are required to give the same capacity as one tram, and to replace a Metrolink service of 10 trams an hour between Ashton and Piccadilly—a tram every six minutes, which by London standards is appalling but by northern standards is remarkable—needs an awful lot of extra double-decker buses in addition to those already using that route. Some of the infrastructure in place—the tracks, the overhead lines and the island stations—may have to be taken out temporarily, at great cost to the public purse, to give extra road capacity. I will give the example of Droylsden, which the Minister will be aware of, because his family's solicitor's office is there. The Droylsden tram stop, in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), is a pinch point because it is slap-bang in the middle of a busy road at a crossroad junction in Droylsden town centre and the vehicular part of the road is pinched down to one lane only. It queues back now. If we put all those extra buses along that route without taking out the tram stop altogether, we will have traffic chaos through Droylsden. That is why we will not be fobbed off with a replacement bus service.

I am grateful to the Minister for meeting me last month to discuss my concerns and those of Transport for Greater Manchester, Tameside council and Manchester City Council. However, I am afraid to say that he and the Department for Transport fundamentally underestimate the extent of the damage that the suspension will cause and are stubbornly refusing to explore any alternative solutions.

In addition to massively inconveniencing residents, there are three areas where the Government's plan to suspend the line falls short. First, we have decarbonisation and green investment. Suspending the Ashton Metrolink line will, as I said, increase congestion from buses in an already urbanised part of Greater Manchester, incentivise individuals to travel by private car rather than by zero-emission Metrolink trams, and undermine the Government's own transport decarbonisation plan.

The second area of concern is economic. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority, alongside Tameside council, recently identified the Ashton mayoral development

zone as one of its priority areas to deliver growth in the region. The combined authority has clear and bold ambitions for Ashton and surrounding areas. Tameside council has significantly invested in Ashton town centre, having delivered the new Ashton interchange, learning facilities and new council head offices. Ashton Moss, which is in my constituency, has been identified as a major strategic employment site, with a significant scale of employment and residential growth expected to accelerate the area's economic development. Transport connectivity is essential for that development to succeed, and the suspension of the line would wholly undermine that.

The third area of concern relates to long-term planning. Transport for Greater Manchester has a simple approach to infrastructure and a mantra that I hope the Minister will take on board for HS2: build it once and build it right. The suspension would ride roughshod over that principle. The Government are planning to commit taxpayer money to temporary mitigation works instead of contributing to a permanent solution that would benefit the people of Tameside and east Manchester for generations to come.

I want to be clear that we in Greater Manchester want improved connectivity and investment in transport infrastructure. However, that must be done right and in consultation with the local authorities and Transport for Greater Manchester. Fobbing us off with paper-thin replacement bus services is not going to crack it.

There is a solution—the Minister knows this—because Transport for Greater Manchester has a plan that would allow for the development of HS2 without penalising the people of Tameside and east Manchester. TfGM has proposed the operation of a Metrolink shuttle service from Ashton to New Islington—the station before Piccadilly—during the period of construction. That would necessitate the development of a depot at Ashton Moss to accommodate the fleet as well as the addition of a crossover at the New Islington Metrolink stop. The Minister has cited a cost of £200 million for that work. That is a figure that I dispute and that TfGM and Tameside council strongly dispute. I remind him that construction of the entire Metrolink line from Piccadilly to Ashton-under-Lyne, including the moving of all the public utilities out of the road and into the pavement, the construction of the line and the stations, and the procurement of the trams to run on the line and to the stations, cost less than what he says a depot would cost.

The Minister also cited as a reason for the cost being extortionate that a high-pressure gas main would need to be relocated. That very same gas main was relocated when the Metrolink line was built and that was included in the overall cost that I just cited—and, 120 metres or so from where the depot would be built, the tramline crosses over that gas main. If it does not seem to be an issue 120 metres away, it should not be an issue for the depot.

In closing, I say to the Minister that, please, we have a solution, and that solution has a legacy benefit. If we built that depot on Ashton Moss, not only could we keep a shuttle service to Manchester going on the Metrolink line, but, in future, tram-train operations in eastern Greater Manchester could make use of that same depot, given that the railway line to Stockport via Denton and Reddish South, which I have been campaigning for, runs alongside Ashton Moss and the depot, so it could be used for generations to come.

The best outcome can be achieved only if the Government agree to implement Transport for Greater Manchester's recommendations in full, and work collaboratively with local leaders to ensure that we get this right. I fear that we will be in petition mode, and that there will be a petition from Greater Manchester if the Government do not change tack. I hope not, because I do not want this massive infrastructure upgrade for my city region to be delayed. Let's crack on, let's get it right, and let's build it right first time round.

7.30 pm

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), and I hope he does not mind if I am bold enough to reassure the nation, on his behalf, that although he might have a problem with where Greggs is located, I am sure he remains a passionate fan of its hot goods.

It is fantastic to welcome another big milestone for HS2 in Parliament, and I have spoken frequently about how important the project is for my constituency. This will be levelling up in action as it brings jobs, investment, and opportunities to Crewe and the surrounding area. Let me challenge some of the misconceptions about what is most important about the project. Although speeding up journeys from Manchester or Crewe to London is positive, the real issue this project tackles is capacity. Importantly, given concerns about activity because of the pandemic, this is about not just short-term capacity but futureproofing our railways for decades to come.

A congested railway line is limiting our freight capacity, reducing reliability because it is run so tightly that it does not take much for it to unravel, and limiting local journeys because everything is squashed on to the main intercity routes. That does not mean that speed is not important, but one of the challenges that levelling up has to tackle is young people leaving our towns to find opportunities in big cities. If we want to keep bright, young successful people who want to build their careers, we do not want them having to travel to live in big cities to do that. I know many people in Crewe and Nantwich who would like to stay in the places where they were born and grew up, in the community they contribute to, and where their friends and family are. This leg of HS2 will give them even more quicker, more reliable journey options for Manchester, and encourage them to make a choice to stay living locally and commute.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that this especially promotes the opportunities of engineering to the next generation, which we as a country need far more of? We have projects such as nuclear and HS2, and there are other projects in which young people can see their futures as engineers.

Dr Mullan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I have spoken to people in the Alstom factory in Crewe, which has been the homeplace of industrial activity related to trains in the town. Speaking to the current generation of workers, companies in the rail industry are clear that their ability to provide a succession of future jobs and opportunities relies on decades more work that would be derived from HS2.

Better train services will enable young people to stay in a town, and in contrast to what people think the pandemic has done and what virtual working might do, I suspect that for some groups such services will encourage more commuting, not less. If someone is going to be in Manchester, Birmingham or London only two or three times a week, the choice to stay living in Crewe, and places like it, will be even easier when they do not have to make the journey so often. Reduced journey times from Crewe and places that connect to it, and onward to the big cities, as well as more reliable services, will allow us to level up by letting young people stay and raise a family in the towns and villages they come from.

Railways are at the heart of Crewe's history. Indeed, the town came after the railway, because until the station and rail works were built, Crewe had been just a village. Although we do not have the same dependence on the railway industry that we used to, it remains a key part of our local business sector and a proud part of our history. Major investment in the railways, in whatever form, can only be good news for Crewe. The fact that Crewe is at the heart of these plans means that it will benefit directly from the single biggest investment in the railways ever in the north and midlands.

What we are doing with HS2 feeds into our wider investment in the railways. It is not just journey times that are improving. Across the north and midlands, capacity on the busiest routes is being doubled, tripled, and in some cases quadrupled, as part of the integrated rail plan. Contrast that with how under Labour, the Northern Rail franchise was let on the basis of zero passenger growth and zero investment. The Opposition like to talk big, but their record is not so impressive when it comes to passengers in the north.

Many companies in Crewe and Nantwich contribute to the building and maintenance of trains and railway lines in all sorts of different ways. Crewe has 7% of the rail workforce in England, despite having just 0.1% of the population. HS2 is already creating jobs and investment locally. For example, as part of a conglomerate bid Alstom, which runs the site I mentioned earlier, has won a contract to build bogies that sit beneath train carriages. Crewe is back to building trains for the first time in decades—I know how happy the town was, as well as the workers on that site, to hear that.

I recently held a meeting with the support of HS2, which I am grateful for, to enable local businesses to hear about how they can win contracts and opportunities. Those opportunities are vast, and go beyond big construction companies. A huge workforce is mobilising on various sites, including in Crewe, to deliver construction, and local businesses will have opportunities to do everything from housing that workforce to feeding them and even cutting their hair. It was great to see the enthusiasm displayed at the event, and I am keen for local SMEs to gain more contracts from phase 2. There is a great track record in the number of local UK businesses and SMEs that have won contracts to date.

Crewe will be a flagship connector station, connecting high-speed services and the existing railway network. I want—I would like the Minister to listen closely to these remarks—the station and the surrounds to reflect that status, and to get the investment that is needed to match up to the likes of London, Birmingham and Manchester. The Minister knows well that I have been pressing him and Minister responsible for levelling up

[*Dr Mullan*]

to work closely with Cheshire East Council and our local enterprise partnership, to get the funding we need to ensure that we are not the poor relation on the route. The Government are right to want local government to invest as well, and to leverage other opportunities. Cheshire East is committed to providing land and investment, and I hope the Government can play their part.

In the near term, the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities will receive a bid for levelling up funding to transform the car, pedestrian and cycle infrastructure around the station, to prepare it for the arrival of HS2. I hope the HS2 Minister, who I am sure will be asked to give his views, will give the bid his full support as a first step towards all arms of national and local government working collaboratively to deliver a station that matches the ambitions for the residents and businesses of Crewe.

With the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) in her place, it would be remiss of me not to mention that the centrality of Crewe to HS2 is just one of many reasons why Crewe is the best possible candidate for the headquarters of Great British Railways. I know we have support for that across the Chamber from MPs from Stoke, Chester and around Cheshire, advocating for Crewe's uniquely placed role in freight, the existing railway network, and the high-speed future of the railway. Crewe is at the heart of our railways and railways are at the heart of Crewe. Our community is raring to go when it comes to the public vote, and I hope we hear good news about the shortlist soon. Crewe has a bright future ahead of it beyond just HS2. We have a £22.9 million town deal that we are working hard to bring to life, £14 million of future high streets funding, and £5 million invested in the Institute of Technology at South Cheshire College. However, HS2 will help us to supercharge all those opportunities and deliver the best possible future for my constituents. That is why I am happy to speak in support of the Bill today.

7.38 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in such an important debate, and to follow the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan). I was fascinated to hear his points about his town. I represent a town that also grew dramatically due to the railways. Indeed, the whole spread of southern England, from west London through Slough, Reading and smaller places such as Didcot, Swindon and over to Bristol, benefited hugely from that historic railway investment. We look forward to further investment and benefits from Crossrail and the Elizabeth line, and I send the hon. Gentleman good wishes, and hope that his constituency benefits in the same way.

I have a few important points in general support of HS2. This is a crucial piece of national rail infrastructure, and even though it does not directly relate to the part of the country I represent, I believe it is a national priority for us all. I will also mention the overall benefits of rail investment as a mode of transport, the need for further investment, and the need for more sensitivity and thought from the Government on some of the finer points. In particular, we should learn lessons from Crossrail, which is a fantastic project and piece of investment that we

should all be proud of in this country. Hopefully, the lessons of that huge infrastructure project can be learned for HS2.

Starting with the wider point about national infrastructure, it has been fascinating to hear the speeches tonight. One or two Members have mentioned how our country has sadly lagged behind other western countries and, indeed, some emerging economies in investment in high-speed rail. The economic case for investment at scale is clear, and HS2 is a huge national priority. I am proud that the last Labour Government began the process that has continued under the current Government. There is cross-party agreement and it is a national priority.

HS2's benefits are about capacity, as the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich rightly pointed out, but also reducing time and, as others have mentioned, the regeneration of major cities and smaller towns around the country and the overall benefit to British industry and engineering prowess. We should all be very proud of that and support it. I hope that those who have reservations about HS2 can see the benefits, and I thought my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) was right when he challenged one of the strident opponents to think about some of the benefits. The Minister, the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), made the same point.

On supporting rail investment as a whole, HS2 fits within a wider range of investment in rail as a mode of transport. Rail has so many advantages over other modes of transport, particularly on our highly congested island, where we suffer from enormous amounts of car pollution. There are physical limits to capacity for car travel in most British cities and towns, and through rural areas. We all have residents who are concerned about traffic, congestion and parking from the number of cars we have in the country. We need to think more about using rail, which in many ways is an under-utilised national resource, yet is so wonderful in its economic and environmental benefits.

I want to pick up on a couple of examples to illustrate the need for wider rail investment and its benefits to the country as a whole. We have discussed the benefits in connectivity and time on many fronts, but it is also worth considering the significant advantages of rail in reducing carbon emissions in the UK. Even rail that uses fossil fuels as a fuel has a far lower level of emissions per capita than other modes of transport. It is a much more effective means of transport in that way, and electrification and using renewable, low-carbon or zero-carbon energy has huge benefits to this country and will help us to meet our ambitious carbon reduction targets in a way that is difficult to envisage for other modes of transport.

We need to see investment in rail in the broad sense as a huge national benefit, both economically and environmentally on a big scale. It can help the local environment in our constituencies by getting people out of car commuting and into rail commuting and easing the pressure on neighbourhoods, which can be blighted by car travel. Obviously some people need to use roads for work if public transport is not available, but the two things can be complementary. In my town and the surrounding suburban areas, there are huge benefits when people use public transport. It frees up road space—that is at a premium, and it is extremely difficult to create any more in urban areas—for people who have to

travel, such as those who have a trade or an urgent need to drive or are using a route not provided by public transport. On balance and in general, we need to think about the overall benefits of rail investment, and on that basis I am pleased to support the Bill.

I would like to challenge the Minister and the Government on a number of ways in which they are falling short at the moment. My hon. Friend the Member for Slough is right that we should deliver HS2 in full. It is a very ambitious line, but comparable countries have had much greater investments in high-speed rail over a long time. I remember travelling on the Eurostar from Geneva to Paris in the early 1990s as a student and being staggered by the speed at which I could get across France. That was 30 years ago; we need to invest properly in this link for the whole of England so that the whole route is properly delivered, as was originally envisaged, to provide the benefits we would all like to see for communities across the country—the kind of benefits that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich rightly highlighted in his own area.

The Government need to be careful to listen to MPs and local councils in the north of England, many of whom are rightly holding them to account and expressing serious concerns about how the current proposals are selling local communities short. In particular, the failure in the east midlands is significant. The failure to complete the eastern part of the HS2 network is a huge shortfall to large parts of the north and midlands. If I were representing that region, and particularly if I were a Government MP, I would be disappointed in my colleagues that that change is being put forward.

I will move on to some brief lessons from Crossrail and in particular some local ones from our area in the Thames valley that apply nationally. We need to see significant infrastructure projects not as an end in themselves, but as a resource for future projects. The team that delivered Crossrail have achieved amazing things. It was the biggest infrastructure programme in Europe for many years, and the emphasis is now shifting on to HS2, which will become the greatest exercise of its kind in the continent. We need to learn from the technology and the project management skills.

Getting things back on track when they go wrong with a complicated project of this type is extremely difficult, as I have learned on two visits to Crossrail and the Elizabeth line. I am sure there will be times when there are issues with HS2; we need to address those and learn the lessons of other major infrastructure projects. Problems with delays or teething problems are not just a British phenomenon; the long-delayed new airport in Berlin has taken seven years over its original planned time to be rolled out. I am sure the Minister, the hon. Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson) knows that only too well, but I urge him to work closely with the team that delivered Crossrail to learn the full lessons on project and programme management, engineering advances, the skills and training that were delivered and the interconnection with local communities and local business needs.

In our area, we would have seen Maidenhead as the western terminus of Crossrail, had there not been heavy lobbying within Berkshire and the wider Thames valley for Reading to be that terminus. Obviously, I have a slight bias towards my own home town being the terminus, but arguably there were bigger economic cases to be made. Every council in the Thames valley area, whether

Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat, supported Reading becoming the western terminus. Parties worked together to get the good for the whole area, and in the same way we worked together on other projects and programmes, including the western rail link and other enhancements to our region.

Graham Stringer: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we need to learn the lessons of major infrastructure programmes. Does he agree that one of the lessons we should learn is that if we get major infrastructure right, it lasts for hundreds of years? We are still benefiting from the Victorian investment 200 years ago and 150 years ago in railways. The current methodology for assessing the benefit of HS2 belongs in the 18th century, not the 21st century. The Department for Transport is not really trying to capture the economic regeneration effect and the fundamental change in the structure of transport in this country with the way that it assesses it.

Matt Rodda: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and he is right that we need a wider look at the methodology. It is extremely complicated to make long-term economic predictions at this time, but back in the first phase of the rail revolution in this country in the 19th century, visionary engineers did amazing things that we still benefit from, as he rightly mentioned. Imagine how much potential we are yet to tap into with HS2. We should think of this as a once-in-a-century project, as he rightly says. It benefits all of us across the House, whatever party or area we represent.

In terms of other lessons from Crossrail, I once again urge Ministers to work closely with colleagues from the Government and the Opposition, local councils and, above all, business. We were able to reap the benefits in our area with this huge inward investment to Reading town centre. Companies relocated from within the south-east and from car-dependent developments in such places as Surrey. For example, Ericsson's European and British head office has moved from an industrial estate in Surrey, which was poorly connected to sources of graduates and highly skilled people and physically to other locations such as London, Swindon or Slough. It came to Reading town centre because of that rail connectivity. We need to think in those terms with business and in a much broader sense across party. We need to think about relocating attractive new business opportunities into the transport hubs that have long-term sustainable connections, that do not suffer from delays and congestion like road transport and that are much quicker and more flexible. I am grateful for the Minister acknowledging those points.

Finally, before I sum up, I would like to reiterate the economic and environmental benefits. We need to see them in tandem rather than in contrast to one another, particularly the economic benefits for advanced manufacturing and the regeneration of cities, and the environmental benefits of reducing carbon emissions. Regenerating cities as liveable and walkable places is important in itself, and of huge environmental benefit in reducing suburban congestion from cars.

To sum up, I support the Bill and I am grateful for the cross-party co-operation. We need to have a very long-term approach, as a number of hon. Members have mentioned. The Government could do more to engage with local political representatives and business. I look forward to them doing that.

7.50 pm

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda), who made some very interesting and worthwhile points about how HS2 will be delivered and especially on talking to the team behind Crossrail. Crossrail had its own teething problems, as has HS2, so if we can learn some of those lessons, that would be excellent.

It is also a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan), who made some excellent points. He has been a doughty champion on this issue for a long time, although unfortunately he did misspeak when he said that Crewe and not Heywood should be the home of Great British Railways. I will forgive him.

I completely understand the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) about the effect of suspending Metrolink. I have been having my own battle to get it to my constituency, so I definitely understand why he does not want it to go anytime soon.

This is a very timely, some might say slightly overdue, Bill and I welcome it very warmly. For some of us, getting HS2 to Manchester has been a labour of love for well over a decade. I think back to my time in Salford town hall, having these debates and talking about, "Oh, it's only a couple of years down the track." Of course, then it was a couple more years and then a couple more years, so it is very nice to be here debating this Bill in this Chamber.

At the heart of the Government's manifesto at the last general election was the commitment to level up the UK. The Bill is evidence of that commitment. The industrial revolution began in Manchester. It was the world's first industrial city and it should be at the heart of the next industrial revolution and the industrial revolution after that. Of course, the unspoken truth is that for a very, very long time investment in this country was tilted very heavily towards the south, creating the perverse situation where what was once the cradle of this country's productivity was dependent on handouts from the part of the country that we dragged kicking and screaming into first the 19th century and then the 20th century. HS2 is an investment in infrastructure that the north of England desperately needs. We are not talking about the old "teach a man to fish" argument. We know how to do that. We basically invented fishing in this scenario. We just want our fishing rod back.

One of the most spurious arguments against the project is that the time it takes to get from Manchester to London is already a little over two hours and that HS2 will not really make a big difference. That, of course, spectacularly, and often deliberately, misses the point. This is about capacity, not just speed. The demand to do business up north far outpaces our ability to deliver, because we are choked off from the vital infrastructure we need to compete. It is a fact that HS2 will not just enable better north-south connectivity; by doubling capacity between London and Manchester, regional lines will also be freed up for more east-west and local services, too.

Andy Carter: My hon. Friend is making a very good speech and his point on north-south is very well made. He will know that there is to be a new high-speed line

which will pass through Warrington, through Warrington Bank Quay, into Manchester. The value of creating north-south, east-west in the north of England is the big picture we should be considering. We are talking about an HS2 Bill, but we should look at the full picture with the £96 billion investment that the Government are making in the north of England. When we add all those things together, it really is a phenomenal investment in rail in the north of England.

Chris Clarkson: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. In fact, this is the biggest investment in rail, I believe, in the history of this country and it is certainly more than the sum of its parts. That £96 billion will multiply and multiply again. Warrington is already a hub of both commercial and industrial activity. It is not properly connected to Manchester. It is a bit of a mission to get from A to B, as it is to get from Warrington to Liverpool. To get from Liverpool to Manchester is like pulling teeth. The very first seat I contested, in 2015, was Wallasey. I had to start very, very early in the morning on a Saturday to get there in time for my first canvassing session. I would welcome more connectivity, especially the high-speed rail link my hon. Friend talks about.

This Bill is more evidence that the Government are delivering on the integrated rail plan for the north. The Crewe-Manchester scheme will also provide the basis on which much of Northern Powerhouse Rail can be developed. I hope that eventually it will provide connectivity from Liverpool in the west to Hull in the east.

Mike Amesbury: On connectivity and levelling up the north, my constituency includes Northwich, not far from Manchester and certainly not far from Crewe. HS2 is wonderful in terms of the job opportunities it will create in Crewe and the surrounding area, but on average it takes one hour 40 minutes to get from Northwich to Crewe, which the hon. Member will know is not actually that far up the road. Those who are disabled or immobile and who need to use a buggy cannot go in one direction, because there is no disabled access. He paints a wonderful picture on investment, but does he agree that there is a considerable way to go?

Chris Clarkson: I paint a wonderful picture because there are so many wonderful things to work with, but I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman's point. Accessibility to public transport is hugely important. I have the same problem with the stations in my constituency. I only have two and one of them is completely inaccessible for those with even the slightest of mobility issues, so we have a lot more to do. Investment in local services will be driven by the fact that there will be more demand for them once we free up capacity, but I absolutely take the hon. Gentleman's point. I know his part of the world very well and for somewhere so well located it is surprisingly poorly connected.

I hope that providing connectivity from east to west will be a vital part of our long-term competitiveness as a region. I strongly urge Ministers to keep up the pressure on that part of the project. East-west will be as important, if not more so, than north-south in the long run.

I am pleased that Ministers from the Department for Transport have been engaging with local government to make sure they can build on the opportunities of HS2

and spread the benefits of this public investment in levelling up across the region. It will not just be the centre of Manchester that will benefit. Those on the outskirts will also see the rewards. It will bring more investment into our area and into other areas of the north-west, too. It will spread the good around.

That is not to say there are not some sticking points. My hon. Friend the Minister, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson) will have heard from most Greater Manchester MPs at one point or another. Obviously, there will be some snagging issues, but I am pleased to say that in the round when I have had questions or concerns, I have been able to have a frank and open conversation with him and have received honest answers, even if they are not always the ones I wanted.

I understand that the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has a number of concerns about the Bill in its current form, the largest of which is how Manchester Piccadilly will be developed and configured to accommodate HS2. Its preference is for an underground through-station, rather than the proposed new six-platform overground station next to the existing one. I am pretty agnostic about that—I can see arguments for both—but I took the time to do a bit of homework on the underground option. My concerns, essentially, are that the project calls for a huge tunnel to be built under the station which is larger than anything that has ever been drilled before. We would end up with the same situation as Euston, where we have to build a giant box underground. That, in turn, means it cannot be situated under the existing station, so it needs to be either alongside it, as is the case with the overground station anyway, or somewhere else altogether, which is largely pointless.

As the GMCA wants a through station, we will need to have very bendy tunnels, which will slow down the trains on their approach and increase journey time, or we will have to build the station at a right angle to the existing station, which will mean it will be an absolute nightmare for people to get from A to B, again negating its value. Added to that is the fact that we will have a hole in the ground for a period of about seven years, which will basically be an opencast mine, with trucks making thousands of movements a year to take spoil through the centre of Manchester.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): I am reminded of a session we had yesterday about protestors tunnelling to prevent HS2. Does my hon. Friend think that Opposition Members who support HS2 should rethink their opposition to the Public Order Bill, which HS2 Ltd says is necessary to prevent protestors holding back HS2?

Chris Clarkson: My hon. Friend knows that I am an enthusiastic supporter of the Public Order Bill. To be fair, if we could get the protestors to do the tunnelling for us, it might save us 5 billion quid. That might be a way of doing it—get a few Swampy types in and get the job done.

We have regenerated the centre of Manchester many times, certainly in my adult lifetime, but this is not the kind of regeneration that we particularly want. It will undo a huge amount of good. Digging up a square mile of the city centre will certainly not deliver the value for money that we want. Having said that, may I encourage the Minister to publish in the Library the cost-benefit

analysis of both versions of the station? That would enable a fuller debate, especially when the Bill comes before the Select Committee. The subject needs to be discussed further.

Mike Amesbury: If an underground station is good enough for London, why not Manchester? The scale of this investment will benefit generations to come. We have to get this right. What is good enough for London certainly should be good enough for Manchester.

Chris Clarkson: As a proud northerner, I do not think there is any bit of London that cannot be improved by digging it up. I do not think that the same is true of the centre of Manchester.

As for the cancellation of the Golborne spur, I join my hon. Friends the Members for Leigh (James Grundy) and for Warrington South (Andy Carter) in welcoming the reconsideration of that ludicrous white elephant. As hon. Members well know, it was originally included only as a sop to the former Member for Leigh, who is now the Mayor of Greater Manchester. That money could be much better deployed elsewhere, including on integrating our public transport properly.

That point brings me to my favourite subject: public transport. One area on which I can make common cause with the GMCA is that the project needs to be fully integrated into whatever network the Mayor gets around to implementing. I particularly note the call for a new Metrolink station, Piccadilly Central, to be included in the project. I support that call fully, although I will be less than chuffed if central Manchester gets yet another metro station before either Heywood or Middleton is connected to the network.

I urge the GMCA and Transport for Greater Manchester to get their collective digits out of wherever they are, and get on with the feasibility studies that are supposed to deliver these projects. Obviously, levelling up needs to be more than just a railway, but building HS2 is a vital first step towards drawing wider investment into Greater Manchester and the wider north-west. Building this scheme will help to bring businesses, jobs and prosperity to our region.

Katherine Fletcher: We have heard in interventions from Opposition Members the idea that somehow this is not enough. Has my hon. Friend considered how many generations of neglect the north of England has had to put up with in its transport and rail infrastructure? Does he welcome, as I do, the fact that it is this Conservative Government who are sorting it out?

Chris Clarkson: I absolutely do. For generations, we have had our faces pressed against the glass of economic opportunity, only to be told that it is too expensive for us or that it is not the sort of thing our part of the world needs. It is always an over-investment; then, of course, as soon as we are the ones spending the money, we are not spending enough. It is the Andy Burnham textbook—but people seem to like that, so who knows?

The region, which a couple of centuries ago levelled up this country, and consequently the rest of the world, will be our link to a new economic horizon for the north-west and for the entire country. It will allow us to connect our world-class businesses, our world-class universities and our innovation in science and technology to the rest of the country and beyond. HS2 between

[Chris Clarkson]

Crewe and Manchester is a major step towards rebalancing regional discrepancies in investment, and I expect it to have a similar positive effect on economic development elsewhere.

We need to get on with the project now. The longer it takes, the more opportunities are lost. As I have said, it is not just about speed; it is about capacity.

8.3 pm

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak on the Bill's Second Reading and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson). It goes without saying that improving connectivity across the whole UK is fundamental to the Government's levelling-up agenda. HS2 can promote growth across the country, open up new employment opportunities and enable more efficient travel for millions, all while supporting net zero by 2050.

Even the most ardent supporters of HS2 must accept that it does not command ringing endorsement from all quarters. Many of my constituents, understandably, question its cost in particular. Personally, however, I believe that a 21st-century Britain needs a modern rail link such as is proposed. We have fallen behind our continental neighbours, making do with dated infrastructure.

The overriding reason for the development of HS2 has not been reducing journey times to and from London, but creating much-needed new capacity on a crowded network. That is important for all of us, but from the perspective of north Wales, this national infrastructure project can do more. First, in combination with Northern Powerhouse Rail, it can much improve our connections to the cities of Manchester and Liverpool and their airports, as well as beyond.

Secondly, the project can and must prompt investment in the north Wales coast main line to Crewe and Warrington. Electrifying and upgrading the north Wales main line in the manner proposed by Sir Peter Hendy in his Union connectivity review would result in fit-for-purpose regional connections and could allow through-running of HS2 trains, both southbound and northbound. All this would be transformative. It is a No. 1 priority for regional MPs and for the all-party parliamentary group on Mersey Dee North Wales, which I chair.

Matt Rodda: One of the things that so excite me about Crossrail is that local authorities and businesses are already thinking about the next stage—about spurs off it, other uses and so on. It is wonderful to hear that the hon. Member and his colleagues are thinking about taking HS2 along the coast into north Wales. I wish him well.

Dr Davies: I thank the hon. Member for that intervention. A huge amount of work has certainly been done with the campaign organisation Growth Track 360, which is looking at that. There is an amazing graphical interpretation to be found online of how it might look, with the train passing Conwy castle; it was developed by a Ukrainian, in fact. It is fantastic.

Today, Manchester and Liverpool can be reached in just over an hour by road, on average, from Rhyl in my constituency. In comparison, existing rail services

take about two hours, yet a similar distance by rail in the south-east of this country takes as little as 40 minutes.

Katherine Fletcher: I have family there: my nain and taid—well, not mine, but I borrowed them—came from Rhyl. They always used to talk about the income lost to the tourism industries of the beautiful north Welsh hills because the public transport connections were not what they could be. Has my hon. Friend done any assessment of the scale of the economic improvement that could be made?

Dr Davies: Yes, work has been done by Growth Track 360 and others to look at improvements that could be made to the regional economy. Tourism, as my hon. Friend says, is right at the top. So many people in the north-west, the west midlands and further afield would visit north Wales if they could get there more quickly.

Poor regional rail services stifle economic growth, including in our vital tourism sector. They suppress efforts to reduce higher-than-average unemployment and result in just 2% of commutes to the north-west of England being made by rail, which is about 80% less than the national average.

I strongly urge the Minister to ensure that when the updated rail network enhancements pipeline is due, it includes an ambitious programme for the north Wales coast main line. Signalling improvements, line speed enhancements, infrastructure to allow express trains to overtake slow trains and capacity improvements in and around Chester station are all required to deliver that programme, as is electrification. Electrification will ultimately be required regardless, of course, to fulfil the decarbonisation agenda, but it needs to be prioritised. Placing all those improvements at the formal RNEP decision-to-develop stage now will allow north Wales and west Cheshire to properly benefit from HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail.

Andy Carter: My hon. Friend is making a very good speech indeed. He talks about north Wales and the north-west, but a very obvious benefit of improving the main line along the north Wales coast is that it would also improve connections to Northern Ireland, because of the ferries from Holyhead to Dublin. The opportunity to connect all parts of the UK by improving rail is critical for the north Wales coast.

Dr Davies: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is what Sir Peter Hendy looked at in his Union connectivity review, which makes that point about the links across the UK, to Ireland and to the continent.

By investing in the improvements that I have outlined, we can prepare the ground to bring much of north Wales within a two-hour journey of London once the London to Crewe 2a section of HS2 is completed. Work on some elements of that agenda has already been conducted, or is due to be undertaken shortly, meaning that initial works could get under way sooner rather than later. I look forward to meeting the Chief Secretary to the Treasury shortly, alongside my colleagues in north Wales, to discuss further the soon-to-be-updated RNEP.

HS2 is an important British engineering and infrastructure project, which, like the M6, will be located in England but will benefit north Wales. There are those

who say that HS2 should be considered an England-only project with Barnett consequentials arising for Wales. Journeys to and from north Wales overwhelmingly run on an east-west axis, and in my view there is absolutely no value in engaging in separatism and seeking to pretend otherwise. However, after many decades of underinvestment, the time for a significant financial commitment to the Crewe to Holyhead line has well and truly arrived. With such investment, HS2 will bring greater benefits to north Wales and thereby help to bring the Union closer together. With that in mind, I hope the Minister can give some clarity about when we might anticipate the Government's full response to the Union connectivity review.

The inclusion in the Bill of a Crewe northern junction joining the west coast main line and HS2 north of Crewe is important for north Wales in ensuring an adequate throughput of northbound services at Crewe, and therefore sufficient connecting services for my region. I was pleased to help to lobby for this northern junction some years ago, alongside colleagues at the north Wales and Mersey Dee rail taskforce, who lead the Growth Track 360 campaign that I have mentioned. However, it is vital that funding be found for a fit-for-purpose Crewe hub station building and infrastructure, and that the design be future-proofed to allow rapid connections and HS2 through services to north Wales.

I move on to the recent announcement that the Golborne link will no longer be constructed. That brings with it potentially good news for north Wales, assuming that the route northbound via Warrington is to be upgraded accordingly. I encourage the Minister to examine that possibility carefully.

I recently met the head of public affairs for Manchester airport, Andy Clarke, who outlined to me the airport's enthusiasm for HS2 but emphasised the need for several matters to be properly examined in the near future, including the likely impact of construction, the concern over the requirement for a local funding contribution towards the new airport HS2 station and the need to ensure that public transport links between the new station, the existing station and terminal buildings are up and running from day one. Once again, I hope the Minister will take that on board.

Graham Stringer: On the point about Manchester airport, does the hon. Gentleman think it is discriminatory, and that it certainly does not help the levelling-up agenda, for Manchester airport to be expected to make a financial contribution to the station at the airport, when none of the other airports along the line are expected to do so?

Dr Davies: That is a valid point. I do not have the detail of other airports and the value that they are destined to derive from HS2. Clearly, Manchester international airport is a busy and successful one, and perhaps it can contribute towards the costs. It needs to be closely involved in the precise design and costings of the proposals.

This Bill will provide significant opportunities to level up across the UK, while protecting and strengthening the Union. It will also create very many well paid jobs during the construction phase and beyond. I urge the Minister to ensure that the potential opportunities for north Wales from HS2 are seized upon, in part by

confirming and ensuring that the future through running of HS2 trains from Crewe on to an electrified north Wales coast main line is a serious aspiration for the Government.

8.14 pm

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): My opposition to HS2 has been expressed somewhat forcefully in this House over the two and a half years for which I have had the privilege of representing the Buckingham constituency. I note with some sadness, and certainly bewilderment, that we continue to debate this relic from the Blair-Brown Labour Government; and, worse than that, to extend it yet further with this Bill, bringing to more parts of the country, and more lives, the human misery that my constituents have experienced since enabling works and construction started. We have heard some commentary about the Leader of the Opposition's previous stance, and perhaps this is one occasion on which Captain Hindsight got it right the first time.

It is not lost on me that this debate comes on the eve of the hard left and the unions bringing our railways to a halt, and preventing hard-working British people, schoolchildren and people who want to go out for the day from getting on the railways that we do have. I was struck by what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport said in his earlier statement, which provides important context to our debate:

"The railway is in a fight...not just competing with other forms of public and private transport but competing with Teams, Zoom and other forms of remote working. Today, many commuters who three years ago had no alternative but to travel by train have...the option of not travelling at all. Rail has lost a fifth of its passengers."

In the light of the Secretary of State's words, it has to be asked why on earth we continue to plough in excess of £100 billion into a railway project that blights the British countryside and delivers none of the real or quantifiable benefits that some—including, and I say this with great respect, hon. and right hon. Members who spoke before me—believe it does. I welcome the cancelling of the eastern leg and the cancelling of the Golborne spur, but even before those bits were chopped off, the benefit-cost ratio was only 0.6:1.7. We are yet to see from the Government where that BCR sits today with a scaled-back HS2.

I want to focus on two things. First, why on earth are we continuing to plough money into this thing? Secondly, from my constituency experience, I say to hon. and right hon. Members who support the Bill and want to extend HS2 further that they should be careful what they wish for. But before I get on to that, I want to explore a point that others have raised today about the ongoing HS2 debate.

At the start, HS2 was all about speed; it was all about how fast we could get to Birmingham or Manchester, which are fantastic parts of our United Kingdom. Personally, I have never had a problem with the time it has taken to get by rail to Birmingham, to Manchester or, for that matter, up to Glasgow, where I had clients when I ran my business. The debate very quickly became about capacity, and we have heard that word a lot today. As the Secretary of State said in his statement, however, rail has lost a fifth of its passengers, so presumably we no longer have that capacity problem. Earlier this year, we even saw suggestions reported in the press in relation

[Greg Smith]

to the Transport Committee and others that HS2 had become about propping up the construction industry. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) said in her excellent speech earlier, with 1.3 million vacancies in the economy, I do not think that the taxpayer should be propping up anything at all in the construction industry. At present, it is almost impossible to find a builder for either a big or a small project. It is almost impossible to work to a tight timescale.

I challenge my hon. Friend the Minister, when he sums up the debate, to give us an answer to this question. Is it about speed, is it about capacity, is it about propping up the building industry? There is a further question that should worry all those on this side of the House, all those with a free-market, low-tax, small-state viewpoint: how it can be that we are building this thing entirely at cost to the taxpayer? If there really is such high demand for HS2, if it really is the great railway, the golden bullet, that will solve all the north-south transport problems in the country, why does no one in the private sector want to risk their own pounds and pence in real investment? Why does no one have the confidence to put their own money into this project? That is a massive alarm bell that should sound in the minds of certainly every Conservative, if not every Member in the House.

As we look at extending high-speed rail yet further, from Crewe to Manchester, I say again that those who support this should be careful what they wish for. I extend an open invitation to any Member to visit my constituency, and to travel through villages and hamlets such as Terrick, Butlers Cross, Ellesborough, Little Kimble and Great Kimble, Marsh, Stone, Fleet Marston, Waddesdon, Quainton, Edgcott and Grendon Underwood, Steeple Claydon, Twyford, Charndon, Chetwode, Westbury, Turweston—and there are more. I invite Members to come and see the scale of not just the devastation caused to the Buckinghamshire countryside, but the real human misery that goes with that. There are the endless road closures, often taking place at a moment's notice. In a rural environment, that does not mean a five-minute diversion to get the kids to school, to get to work, or to go wherever else people wish to go; it is often a half-hour or a 45-minute diversion.

Let me give the House a tangible example of where that can really strike. The Princes Centre is a daycare centre in Princes Risborough, quite a long way from the trace of HS2, but serving clients from all over the county of Buckinghamshire. It has had to pay 75% more in overtime rates for its employees to account for the time for which those carers are stuck in traffic—for no good reason, other than the HS2 road closures and endless traffic lights and diversions—while trying to reach the people who rely on their care. We have all seen the price of fuel rise in recent months, but the centre's fuel consumption has increased by more than a quarter because of those diversions. This is an independent daycare centre, a charity, suffering severe financial penalties because of all the road closures and other disruptions that HS2 has brought to the county of Buckinghamshire.

Let us travel a little further up the road, to Fleet Marston on the edge of the town of Aylesbury, where the Hunters farm land all around the A41. HS2 has acquired a significant proportion of their land—farmland,

arable land—and as a result of the way in which it has treated that land, it has become entirely waterlogged. No proper drainage has been put in place, and where the Hunters still have land to farm, their crops are completely ruined. No signs have been put up around the farm, and HS2 HGVs are constantly driving through the farmyard, finding it almost impossible to do three-point turns to get out again. This has also created an extremely dangerous stretch of the A41, the main road that runs through my constituency from Aylesbury to Bicester, where every day hundreds of HGVs come very close to people who are trying to go about their daily business. There have been many near misses on that stretch of road, and, sadly, there have been fatalities.

I could give countless examples of other farmers across the constituency who have been messed about time after time. They have, for instance, been subject to poor timescales for crop loss compensation, when they have not been able to farm their land or grow the crops or graze the cattle. In some cases, it has taken two harvests for farmers to receive the compensation.

Great Moor Sailing Club, just outside Calvert, has experienced massive construction disruption, which has almost prevented it from carrying out its activities. Agreements made between contractors and the club have constantly failed to be met and honoured. A good neighbour High Speed Two Ltd is categorically not.

Let us go a little further up the road to Steeple Claydon, where the bus company Langston & Tasker operates. That company has one of the main home-to-school contracts in the county of Buckinghamshire. Andy and Dan Price, who own the business, are having to deal not only with the increase in overheads that the cost of living pressures and the global oil price have brought to them, but massive increases in overheads because of the diversions that are affecting their school buses, and the damage to their vehicles caused by the crumbling roads that have been unable to cope with the thousands of daily HGV movements. Tyres have been torn off the company's buses because the edge of the road has become like a bread knife as those thousands of HGVs have been forced out on to the verge, causing huge damage.

There are cases of landowners being messed around by not being offered a fair price for their land, or having land taken only to be told, "We have taken too much" or "We have taken too little and will have to take a bit more, but we are not going to tell you when you will get it back, or if you will get it back". There was one tragic case of a farmer in my constituency who suffered a fatal heart attack. It is certainly the family's view that the strains and the pressures and the stresses of the way in which he was treated by High Speed 2 Ltd were in part, if not wholly, to blame.

Construction projects like this bring real misery to communities. They will bring that same misery along the stretch from Crewe to Manchester. They will bring that same misery wherever big state infrastructure is put in place.

I am grateful to the HS2 Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson), who has visited the constituency and always been available to discuss concerns. I am grateful to the new residents commissioner, Stewart Jackson, for spending two and a half hours in my car on Friday morning as I personally drove him round all the sites where roads have been

damaged and showed him the inexplicable contradictions between what HS2 said it would do and what it has actually done. I showed him some of the farms that have been so badly messed about, and the homes have been boarded up and taken. I am also grateful to the construction commissioner, Sir Mark Worthington, for the time he has spent in the constituency and in engaging with me.

However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) said earlier, there are still no answers about the price that has to be hit before anyone says, “Enough!” The reality is that when these big projects set off, with their huge commitments and unlimited budgets, they take on a life of their own. Completing these projects becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and the contractors are out of control, no matter how much goodwill and fantastic effort goes into trying to rein them in.

To put this into perspective, let me say that I doubt that any other right hon. or hon. Member has a member of staff working full time just on the construction of this railway and East West Rail in their constituency. Such is the scale of the workload—the incoming—on HS2-related matters in my constituency.

No matter how much goodwill and engagement there is, and no matter how much the issues are looked at and properly interrogated, the contractors will carry on regardless. HS2 Ltd will carry on regardless. They see it as building this railway, full stop. We often get warm words. We often get roadshows at which they say they are listening, but the problem is that nothing changes. I give this to the House as a warning: this is the reality that underpins some of these infrastructure projects, particularly this one. I live in hope that one day sense will be seen and this project can be scrapped for good, but in the meantime we need a massive change of attitude from HS2 Ltd, from the contractors and from all who work for them, so that they start to put communities first.

8.31 pm

Robert Largan (High Peak) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith), who I have known for nearly 15 years. He is a great friend of mine and I know he is a fantastic champion for his constituents. He spoke passionately about how he is standing up for them and how this project has impacted them. On his wider points opposing HS2, what he said was almost entirely nonsensical and I look forward to demolishing it in a moment.

In the long run we are all dead, according to John Maynard Keynes, and that attitude has been wholeheartedly embraced by many politicians throughout the years. That is understandable, because it is all too easy and tempting to focus on short-term urgent political gains and it is always difficult to spend all our political and financial capital on long-term strategic decisions for which we will get no credit and whose benefit will not be felt for decades to come. We are seeing this short-termism hurt our country in many ways, most acutely through the failure of the Blair Government to renew our nuclear power stations, which we are really feeling now, so I think this Government deserve a lot of credit for going ahead with high-speed rail.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): There might be a contrary view that people in this place sometimes decide on these nice shiny things—for example, George

Osborne and his super-duper high-speed trains—knowing full well that they will not have to be there to implement them. The Government might say that in 50 years’ time they want net zero or whatever it is, but they are not going to be there. That is what has happened in this case: it is a white elephant. Come on!

Robert Largan: Well, I am very glad I took that intervention. I would say that perhaps George Osborne did expect to be here, but that is beside the point.

As I was saying, I believe that the Government deserve significant credit for taking a very long-term decision that will be of huge benefit to the country, although they will not get any credit for it for a long time to come. Let us contrast that with the Leader of the Opposition, who spent his first four years in Parliament focusing on two objectives. The first was to block High Speed 2 and the billions of investment in the north of England. The second was to try to make the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) Prime Minister.

Chris Clarkson: Does my hon. Friend think that is proof that the only north-west the Leader of the Opposition is interested in is NW1?

Robert Largan: I could not have put it better myself. When I flagged this point earlier, Opposition Members said it is a constituency interest, which is very revealing. A Member of Parliament’s list of priorities is supposed to be country, constituency, party and then self. It is slightly worrying that, when the interests of the country come up against the interests of a narrow corner of north London, the leader of the Labour party opts for self, party, constituency and then country last, which is very revealing about his priorities.

HS2 is an important infrastructure project, so I take great pleasure in busting some of the myths we have heard this evening. A series of myths about high-speed rail have been perpetuated over the last decade by a combination of muddled thinking and well-financed interest groups, and I will take them one by one.

As we have heard tonight, this is all about time. Who needs an extra 30 minutes off rail journeys down to London? First, this has never been primarily about journey times and speed; this has always been about capacity.

Greg Smith: My hon. Friend and I never fell out when we took opposite sides in the Brexit referendum, and we will not fall out over this. He says HS2 has always been about capacity, so why did it have to be built as a high-speed line so dead straight that it had to go through the middle of ancient woodland and the Calvert Jubilee nature reserve? If it were about capacity, the line could have been slower from the outset and could therefore have gone around ancient woodland and nature reserves.

Robert Largan: If we are going to spend billions of pounds on a new railway line, we want to make it a fast line. If we were to give in to my hon. Friend’s demands and scrap HS2 tomorrow, we would quickly run up against gridlock on the west coast main line, which is almost at complete capacity already.

Katherine Fletcher: The internet is a wonderful thing, and I have just looked at trains from Wellingborough into central London and at trains from Preston into central Manchester, a not dissimilar distance. Should my hon.

[Katherine Fletcher]

Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) be in his wonderful constituency, he could get three trains before the trains close even on a day of disruption.

Esther McVey: Not today.

Katherine Fletcher: I have just checked. And from Preston to Manchester, a similar distance, there is one train because the capacity is not there. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) made a wonderful speech, people need to understand what it feels like to be a rail user in the south-east of England. Does my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Robert Largan) agree that capacity is the key point?

Robert Largan: Yes, capacity is the key point.

Mr Bone: As my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) obviously knows more about Wellingborough than I do, she might mention that the cattle trucks they are now using, as we cannot spend proper money because it is being wasted on HS2, are of great detriment to my constituents. By the way, a person cannot get on at Wellingborough and go north. It is a total waste, totally wrong. If there was any argument not to pass this nonsense tonight, she should come to Wellingborough and then she would be on my side. Does my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Robert Largan) agree?

Robert Largan: It gives me great pleasure to facilitate that tête-à-tête between my hon. Friends the Members for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) and for Wellingborough (Mr Bone).

One of the most frequent tropes used by opponents of HS2 is, “We don’t need to invest in rail because we have high-speed broadband. Everyone will be working from home and having remote meetings, so it is not a problem at all.” How would we deliver freight via Zoom? It is not possible to deliver millions of tonnes of freight a year over the internet, and those who argue otherwise are completely missing the point. We desperately need to move away from road haulage and on to rail freight, which is one of the big benefits of HS2. It opens up capacity not only for passengers but for rail freight, too. I am very proud to represent a large number of quarries, and I chair the all-party group on mining and quarrying. One big challenge is getting all the aggregate out of our quarries and on to site. At the moment, a huge volume of that is done by road, by HGVs, which causes huge problems across the Peak district. Being able to increase that capacity is a big benefit of high-speed rail.

I next come on to address the point about cost, which has always been mentioned. People say that the cost of high-speed rail is “astronomical” and “completely ridiculous”, and that this is “a white elephant”. Let us consider the opponents of HS2’s worst-case-scenario cost figures—I think they are massively inflated, but let us take them at their word. How much would that actually cost when we spread it out over the lifetime of the project, which is decades? Even on the worst-case scenario, we are looking at about £5 billion a year, which is half of what we spend on overseas aid every year. When we are talking about a huge investment to upgrade the most important railway line in the country, spending 0.25% of our GDP a year over several decades does not seem to be a disproportionate amount of money.

Another of my favourite myths is, “HS2 is bad for the environment.” I recall that in the last one of these debates the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) referred to HS2 as “environmental annihilation”. I am not sure whether she has ever been to Kent, where HS1 exists; it is still the garden of England. One wonders whether some of the opponents of HS2 have ever seen a railway line. We are not talking about eight-lane superhighways; we are talking about a relatively narrow footprint and about beautiful pieces of infrastructure. I would happily take all those people to places such as New Mills and Chapel Milton, where stunning viaducts criss-cross a national park, no less, and are beloved parts of the landscape.

Next, people say, “It’s a false choice. We should be investing in local lines, not spending billions on this big infrastructure project.” That is just a completely false narrative. A big part of opening up this capacity is that it helps existing commuter lines, with High Peak being the perfect example of that. Commuters on the Buxton line heading into Manchester from places such as Whaley Bridge, New Mills, Chapel-en-le-Frith and Buxton are on a really poor service. Why is that? It is because it has to go through the Stockport-Piccadilly corridor, which is one of the most congested lines anywhere in the country. There is not enough space on that line to get a more frequent or more reliable service into Manchester. HS2 opens up the Stockport corridor and will allow for a more reliable and more frequent service for my constituents.

We are also doing all the investment in the local lines too. The £137 million upgrade of the Hope Valley line in my constituency is under construction already; the HS2 Minister recently came with me to see the construction progress. That is also going to have a huge positive impact on commuters in my constituency and, again, it is going to open up freight capacity to help get goods out of the quarries in the Peak District and through into market.

Yes, I would like us to go even further. I would love to see us upgrade the Glossop line as well, as there are interesting proposals to go for a double track beyond Broadbottom to Glossop and to improve signalling on the way into Manchester Piccadilly, which could open up even more improvements on one of the fastest growing and busiest commuter lines anywhere in the country. That would be fantastic too.

Having gone through a number of the myths in relatively quick fashion, let us have a look at what we are talking about tonight, which is this Crewe to Manchester Piccadilly leg. It is really important that we get this right. A number of Opposition Members have talked about Manchester Piccadilly station, and I agree that it is essential that we get this right. Huge sums of money will be involved and this is an opportunity to dramatically improve one of the key stations not just for Manchester or for people in High Peak who commute in there, but for people across the entire north of England. This needs fixing and it is important that we explore all the options, including an underground line.

Mike Amesbury: It is good to hear that we have some consensus on that issue. As the hon. Member powerfully said, it is not a trade-off between a national project and local services and facilities. My constituents in the Northwich part of my constituency would love to have the promised two trains an hour, but because of the lack

of capacity in and around Manchester it just cannot happen. That is where Ministers need to focus a little more energy and to invest to ensure that this project lasts for generations.

Robert Largan: I know Northwich very well—in fact, I used to work there—and HS2 will open up huge opportunities for the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

I am pleased that, after my discussions with the HS2 Minister, the instructions to the Select Committee on the Bill allow it to look into all options at Piccadilly. That is really important. The Committee also needs to look into all options at Manchester airport. A few people have already talked about making certain that we get that right, with the proper Metrolink, rail and bus links. There is lots of work to be done in the Bill's next stage.

Let me conclude by saying that high-speed rail and the Government's wider £96 billion investment in rail in the north of England is good not just for the environment, the economy, jobs and the High Peak; it is good for the whole of the north of England and for the whole country. Let us get on and build it.

8.46 pm

James Grundy (Leigh) (Con): First, I declare my interest: the Golborne spur affects the Grundy family farm, as it affects thousands of other families and businesses in Lowton and Golborne in my Leigh constituency. It has been fascinating to hear so many people talk about Golborne today. I do not think Golborne has ever been mentioned in Parliament so much since Colonel Blood, who came from Golborne, stole the crown jewels from the Tower of London. The people of Golborne are getting all their mentions in Parliament all at once today.

I strongly welcome the decision to scrap the Golborne spur of HS2. My local community and I have campaigned on the issue for 10 years. The news has been almost universally welcomed not just in Lowton and Golborne in my constituency but by the communities affected all along the line. Indeed, so popular was the decision to scrap the spur that when the HS2 Minister and I attended a charity event in neighbouring Culcheth in Warrington shortly after the announcement, not just Conservative councillors but Labour ones were keen to have their photograph taken with him.

The Golborne spur would have had a devastating impact on my constituency. It would have harmed the King's Avenue estate, Pocket Nook Lane, Newton Road, the Oaklands and Meadows estate, the Braithwaite Road and Garton Drive estates, Slag Lane and the Scott Road estate. It would have demolished the Enterprise Way industrial estate, costing hundreds of local jobs that are always vital in a former mining community such as mine but especially important in the current economic climate. It would have also destroyed both Byron wood and Lowton civic field—much-loved green spaces and recreation areas.

Yvonne Fovargue: I have sympathy with all whose homes and land are impacted, but is the hon. Gentleman not prepared to look at the mitigation measures—such as the green tunnel at Lowton—that TfGM has suggested to mitigate the effects on the constituents in Leigh?

James Grundy: I thank the hon. Member for mentioning that. It is interesting, because for pretty much the past 10 years I and other community representatives from Lowton were arguing for that kind of mitigation and we kept being told no. Then, all of a sudden, the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, rocks up a week before the decision is made saying, "D'you know, we're very interested all of a sudden in this mitigation." I turned round and said to the Mayor, "The only form of mitigation that I'm interested in at this point is it not coming through my community at all." We have suffered for long enough throughout this process and for the Mayor to come along at the last minute saying, "Oh, mitigation, mitigation"—no, thank you.

I remember—to digress from my written speech—when the Mayor of Greater Manchester and I stood on a stage together at Lowton Labour Club and promised our constituents, me as the councillor for Lowton East and him as the MP for Leigh, that we would fight the Golborne spur. I am happy to tell the Chamber today that one of us has kept that promise.

It is astounding what has been happening. Wigan Council has made noises off about the Golborne spur. I understand why the hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) wants to represent what she thinks is in the best interests of her constituents. None the less, it sticks in my throat that, during the recent local elections, a very short time ago, the Labour candidate for Lowton East and the sitting Labour councillor for Golborne Lowton West told us that Labour was against the proposal—and one of those people is a cabinet member on Wigan Council. All of a sudden we find out that that is not the case and that, perhaps, it never has been the case. It is incredibly infuriating to see this kind of politics where people stand in elections and say one thing, and then we find out that they actually stand for the exact opposite. It is the worst kind of politics. It is absolutely infuriating.

I am delighted that this amendment has been tabled tonight. Finally, the Opposition cannot hide where they stand on this issue. It has been like Schrödinger's Opposition. Their view depends on whom they are talking to—whether people are for it or against it. Oh, they are always on your side. Well, that is no longer the case.

Christian Matheson: The hon. Gentleman is describing a situation in which some Labour Members are in favour and some are against, but does he not have exactly the same situation on his own Benches? We have heard some excellent speeches tonight against and in favour of HS2. It is just a situation that some support and that some do not.

James Grundy: Sometimes that happens: different boroughs have different opinions, as one might expect. But it is a bit rich for party members at one end of the borough to be saying one thing, and, others at the other end, to be saying another. That is outrageous. That is the job of the Liberal Democrats.

That kind of double standard is totally and utterly insufferable. I am very glad that, tonight, the colour of the Opposition's money will be on the record. I give credit to the hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) because she stood up and said that she welcomes this proposal, and I think that she was right to do so, because everyone along the section of the line has done

[James Grundy]

so, including, my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter), the hon. Member for Warrington North, myself, and my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady), many of whom have long-standing records on this.

I think the hon. Member for Warrington North, who is no longer in her place, will be greatly disappointed by the actions of her colleagues. Labour cannot hide anymore behind this equivocation of being both for it and against it. I am very pleased that we finally know the colour of people's money on this issue.

I shall now return to my written notes. I feel that I have made my position pretty clear on this issue—pretty clear. There will be thousands of residents affected, hundreds of jobs at risk, and untold environment damage, and that is in my constituency alone. Is it any wonder that the Golborne spur has attracted near universal and cross-party opposition except from Wigan Council, which cannot see a bad project ever without backing it enthusiastically.

I should like to pay tribute to the thousands and thousands of local residents who have backed the campaign to scrap the Golborne spur over the past 10 years. Many of them must now feel like pen pals to some Ministers in DFT, so often have they written in to object. We could not have done this without their stalwart support. The community has been overwhelmingly onside. I should mention a few of the groups: Lowton East Neighbourhood Development Forum, Lowton West Residents, Lane Head Residents and Golborne Voice, and a couple of individuals. I have mentioned them before in the Chamber, but I would like to mention them again.

One of those individuals is Ted Thwaite, who sadly passed away six months before the decision was made. I remember his great friend Bob Hamilton saying at his funeral, "If the Almighty's looking down on us with favour, then before too long Ted will have his way and we'll have rid of the Golborne spur." Most people spend their 70s with their feet up in a caravan somewhere. Ted decided that he was not going to let this stand, and spent the entirety of his 70s fighting like hell to ensure it did not happen. I am so sorry he is not here today to see the result—he was a great man—but I hope the decision will stand as a testament to his efforts.

The second person is Linda Graham, who used to be Andy Burnham's office manager, and whose house was very close to the route of the spur. Some hon. Members may have seen me on the BBC's "Sunday Politics" last weekend; we were at Linda's house. Her house backs on to Byrom Hall Wood, which would have been destroyed. Linda was delighted, and there were a huge number of people there from around the local area. She fought and she fought, and she did not care that I was a Conservative and she had been a strong supporter of Andy Burnham. We fought together to get this result, along with all those other people. Especially since Ted passed away, she has been the heart and soul of keeping the community behind the campaign.

For Ted and Linda, the fact that 100 or 500 years from now *Hansard* will record their efforts, when I had never expected in my born days to be standing here, is terribly important. I love the fact that they have been

put into the records and the history books for future historians to look at as the kind of people who fight for their communities and win against all the odds.

It was against all the odds, because I remember when the campaign started we had to fight literally everyone. Every political party was in favour of Golborne spur; there were so many institutions and the rest that it seemed like insurmountable odds. I was the only Conservative on Wigan Council at the time the spur was first proposed, and the fact that over 10 years later we have finally got this end result is simply unbelievable. I am delighted that we have done so, and I genuinely hope that this decision will not be reversed by some sort of procedural chicanery later on.

Gavin Newlands: I'll do my best!

James Grundy: I would be interested to know whether, if the situation was reversed and several villages in Scotland were being destroyed to send a railway line to a large city in England, the hon. Gentleman would be so sanguine, or whether things would be very different. I suspect things might be very different, to put it that way.

To round up, this is the right decision. The communities that were affected by the spur are firmly on board, unanimously delighted, and we will be having a party to celebrate. I welcome the decision with open arms and I am immensely grateful, as are my constituents.

8.58 pm

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): It is a pleasure, as always, to follow my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Leigh (James Grundy). I am only sorry there were no Lib Dems here to hear his—[*Interruption.*] Actually, on reflection I am not.

Back in November last year, we saw the release of the long-awaited integrated rail plan, which set out the Government's intentions for delivering and sequencing major rail investment across the north of England. That was something I warmly welcomed at the time. On the day of the release, the Prime Minister visited Warrington Bank Quay station. I stood on the platform with him and the Secretary of State and we talked about Warrington being at the heart of the country's rail network, with the potential to be the best-connected town in the north of England. I am pleased to say that they were both absolutely right. Warrington is being helped by the addition of a high-speed line through Bank Quay station taking us east to west—but I do not want us to stop there. I want a high-speed line to go through Bank Quay station taking us north to south to deliver on the Prime Minister's statement that we will become the best-connected town in the north of England.

The new high-speed line from Warrington to Manchester and on into Yorkshire will also make use of the Filders Ferry goods line to Liverpool. This will create opportunities by releasing capacity on the existing network for commuter trains and freight, meaning that a new station hub can be created at Warrington Bank Quay right in the heart of Warrington town centre.

To give an example of the need to release capacity, just three years ago Warrington Borough Council and the Government spent about £20 million on building a new station, Warrington West, to service the more than 10,000 new homes built in Chapelford and Great Sankey.

At the time, it was promised that three trains an hour would pass through that station, taking commuters who chose to live in Warrington into Liverpool and Manchester. Today, one train an hour stops at that station because there is not the capacity into Manchester to be able to accommodate more. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) mentioned, if this were in the south of England, we would see many more trains per hour travelling through those stations. The north of England needs to be levelled up, and that capacity is really fundamental.

Katherine Fletcher: My hon. Friend is arguably the best MP Warrington South has had for about 40 years. I have constituents in Leyland who want to come to the thriving economic hub that is Warrington, but at the moment there is no public transport option available to them, so the Department for Work and Pensions is supporting them in gaining car or bike transport to take up the economic opportunities from being near Warrington. Will the integrated rail plan and this change to HS2 make it easier to get the capacity in so that Warrington's growth is growth for the whole of the north-west of England, including Leyland?

Andy Carter: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It will be a catalyst for development not just in Warrington or in Lancashire and Cheshire but for the whole of the north-west of England. That is why the integrated rail plan, with its sequencing and rail investment, is so fundamental for the north of England.

While I was standing on Warrington Bank Quay station, I listened to Opposition spokespeople talking down the £96 billion plan being put forward by Government. There was no recognition of the fact that this Government are putting investment into trains in a way that has never happened before in the north of England—that was completely overlooked by the Opposition parties. There is now an opportunity to deliver on the levelling-up promises and allow people to travel around the north-west of England in a way that they have never done before.

Mike Amesbury: The eastern leg of HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail at the time, was cancelled. That took out billions of pounds and actually levelled down the north. We cannot rewrite history; that is a fact. It is also a fact that there are people in constituencies such as mine who are waiting an hour or an hour and 40 minutes for a train. It is still just not good enough.

Andy Carter: I accept that train services from the hon. Member's constituency are not as good as they should be, but the Government's plan is about addressing those issues by investing in the north of England. I have to ask him: when did the last Labour Government invest in trains in the way that this Conservative Government are doing in the north of England? I do not think they ever did.

I remember knocking on doors at the general election and talking to constituents across Warrington about their priorities. They were really clear that they wanted better opportunities to commute into the principal cities of Manchester and Liverpool, but when they arrived at the station in Manchester on a Monday morning to try to catch a train, there was no capacity—the two carriages

were absolutely full. The Government's investment will address that and resolve those issues, and I know that my constituents welcome the proposal to build a new line far more quickly than was previously proposed.

When I was standing on Warrington Bank Quay station with the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, the fly in the ointment was the HS2 Golborne spur, which would have meant that trains from London bypassed Warrington. It would have been a £2 billion to £3 billion rail investment that would have caused nothing but pain for my constituents in Heatley and Lymm, and for constituents along the line in neighbouring constituencies in Warburton and, crossing the Manchester ship canal, in Rixton and Glazebury, in Culcheth in Warrington North, and in Leigh.

For once, there was an outbreak of unity between me and the leader of Warrington Borough Council. We both opposed the scheme and, finally, the Government have listened and taken steps to put it on hold. On Saturday, I met one of the families who were expecting to lose their house. They had lived under the cloud of the Golborne spur for more than 10 years. I visited their lovely farm on Wet Gate Lane, Lymm and met some of the family who live there. They said to me, "Thank you." They thanked the rail Minister, the HS2 Minister and the Prime Minister for listening to their pleas. Finally, the Government are listening to local people, but the clear message was that we now urgently need to review the safeguarding measures that are in place because, although there is a clear intention to move forward, they still live under the cloud that HS2 could be built in their area.

This is not just about HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail; it is also about investment in public transport through buses. I am incredibly grateful to the Government for the £42 million that is coming to Warrington to level up public transport through buses. An entire new transport fleet is going to Warrington's Own Buses' zero-emission buses, and £16 million of support will help to improve the frequency of buses and ensure that fares are kept low. That will make a massive difference to people living in my constituency, and I am grateful that this Conservative Government are levelling up in the north of England.

9.7 pm

Mr Dhesi: With the leave of the House, I will close this HS2 debate on behalf of Her Majesty's official Opposition. I am sincerely grateful to all hon. Members who have contributed today and made eloquent points. They have sometimes opposed one another, but they have been eloquent on behalf of their constituents.

The hon. Members for Stone (Sir William Cash) and for Buckingham (Greg Smith) and the right hon. Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) spoke eloquently in opposition to High Speed 2. They spoke about the need for consultation and for more reliable and better local transport links. It is right that they did so on behalf of their constituents, who are vociferously opposed to the high speed link.

I thank the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan), who spoke in favour of High Speed 2 and about the huge benefits for his constituents and the increased number of engineering and other jobs available. I also thank the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson), who rightly said that it is not about speed, but about capacity, and that it will help to bridge the north-south divide.

[*Mr Dhesi*]

The hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Dr Davies) spoke about the need for electrification of north-west rail lines and the need to improve east-to-west connectivity with HS2, because that is the only way his constituents and many others in Wales can benefit from HS2. He also spoke about the need finally to publish the rail network enhancements pipeline, and I hope that the Minister was listening. That is in addition to the various written parliamentary questions that I have written to him about that.

The hon. Member for High Peak (Robert Lorgan) also spoke in favour of HS2, and about the lack of capacity in the Manchester corridor and the need to improve that. The hon. Member for Leigh (James Grundy) welcomed the scrapping of the Golborne link, as did the hon. Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter). Indeed, I know from my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) speaking to me that there is a lot of cross-party support for that in their area, although there is not consensus, as we will soon find out, given the amendments put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue).

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) spoke extremely passionately about the need to get on with High Speed 2, and about the need to free up and increase local transport links and increase rail freight. He spoke at length about Manchester Piccadilly station, as did other Manchester colleagues. I ask the Minister to look again at the proposals, particularly with reference to the blight that they would inflict on Manchester and the growth opportunities that would be forgone as a consequence.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) has spoken to me on various occasions about her opposition to the closing of the tram Metrolink for two years. That is completely unacceptable, as my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish also referred to. We need to rethink this proposal, rather than fob off local residents, particularly those in Tameside and the east Manchester conurbation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) spoke about the need to look on this as a national infrastructure priority for all of us, and he also dwelled on the need to learn lessons from the incredible Crossrail project. He spoke about the need to catch up with our European neighbours and those in other parts of the world on high-speed rail.

My hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury) made numerous interventions in the debate and, collated together, they would have more than sufficed to make a speech. He spoke eloquently about the need to get basics right. It is important, in particular, to solve issues such as the collapsed station roof in his constituency as well as the local transport links before we embark on further major infrastructure projects.

I appreciate that, across the House, this Bill can be very divisive, but what is not controversial is wanting to see solid and fair investment across our communities, which I know the whole House can stand behind. I support investment in our great northern and midlands towns and cities, but I cannot in good faith say that, as it stands, this Bill delivers the right infrastructure to long-suffering passengers. I want to see real ambition

from Ministers and Government, but, sadly, all I see is broken promises and excuses. While we should be building a shiny new future for rail, we have, unfortunately, already started on the wrong foot. As we progress through the passing of this Bill, we need to see better, and I hope that the rail Minister has made note of the important contributions today.

The good people of our country deserve better—much better—and we in the Labour party will continue to press Ministers throughout the passage of this Bill on key areas. For example, we will look for: a commitment to Northern Powerhouse Rail being delivered rather than seeing promises reneged upon; a solution to Manchester Piccadilly station that minimises disruption and enables future connectivity to Bradford and Leeds; a solution for the Ashton Metrolink rather than fobbing off local MPs and residents; and for capacity constraints on the west coast main line to be addressed, as referenced by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), allowing for improved connections to Scotland from the north of England. If the Golborne link is also not to be taken forward, any funding saved should be reinvested in local transport projects.

The people of our country deserve a Government who are serious about improving our transport network no matter where one lives or works. We need not just an improvement in route planning and engagement with local leaders and communities but better procurement and employment opportunities for the Great British people. I stand committed to ensuring that people across our country see the benefit of the project in jobs and opportunities, especially having seen the talented young apprentices and engineers during my recent visit to the HS2 Old Oak Common station organised by the all-party parliamentary group for women in transport. We simply cannot stand by when, for example, only one UK-based firm has been shortlisted for £2.5 billion-worth of track and tunnel systems. We must ensure that the bidding process for HS2 contracts takes a holistic approach, looking at the net economic benefit of proposals and the companies who complete them. Labour would ensure that more public contracts went to British companies, from small construction businesses to national corporations. Buying, making and selling more in Britain benefits us all.

Matt Rodda: My hon. Friend is making an excellent point. Does he agree that railway towns across the country, whether in the north, the south, the midlands, Wales or Scotland, would all benefit from such strategic procurement and that it is incumbent on the Government to look at exactly what he talks about?

Mr Dhesi: I fully agree. Indeed, those benefits should not come at a disproportionate financial cost. HS2 should ensure value for money for taxpayers. In 2020, the National Audit Office noted that HS2 was over budget and behind schedule due to an underestimation of its complexity and risk by the Department for Transport, HS2 and the Government. Where is the leadership that the project desperately needs? It urgently needs to get back on track.

Fundamentally, the project's potential is being missed and the only thing that Ministers have brought to the table is a lack of ambition. I hope that, as we move forward with the Bill, key areas of concern will be addressed. Promises made must be kept, including on the completion

of HS2 in full. The Labour party and I will hold the Government keenly to account to ensure that that transpires.

9.18 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): HS2 is a substantial investment in our railways. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who spoke in the debate. All contributions demonstrated the need for us to continue to listen to those who know their local communities best. Both I and my officials will continue to engage with local residents and communities to improve the scheme, to ensure that it is part of building vibrant communities and to support the Government's ambitions to deliver net zero.

Mike Amesbury: Residents, Cheshire West and Chester Council, and Cheshire East Council have real concerns about the geology due to the salt mines around that spur of the line. Will the Minister assure us that he and his officials will address those concerns and respond as a matter of urgency?

Andrew Stephenson: As the hon. Gentleman will know, I work regularly with the leaders of both councils, and on visits to HS2 line-of-route constituencies I have met local campaign groups. HS2 Ltd has taken into account special considerations of the geology in that part of Cheshire, and the design of the scheme has been informed by a wide range of information, including the British Geological Survey's maps and surveys, salt extraction operations, and the locations of mines. We will continue to carry out significant ground investigations as we progress the scheme.

Before I turn to the contributions made during the debate, I will briefly set out some of the motions that we will be seeking to move formally, following Second Reading. The committal motion passes the Bill to a specially appointed Select Committee. It will be tasked with looking into the detail of the route, and hearing any petitions on different aspects of the Bill. I thank the Committee in advance for the work it is about to do. A separate instruction motion is designed to allow the Committee to have a full understanding of the work. That includes an instruction to the Committee to remove the Golborne link from the Bill. If the House passes that motion, the Government will make an additional provision to remove those powers from the Bill. I recognise that the Labour party has tabled an amendment that opposes our motion to remove the Golborne link, but I urge it to give the Government time to consider all the different options to deliver maximum benefits to Scotland, and to deliver Scotland the transport solution it deserves. To maximise those benefits to Scotland and the north, it is right that we remove the Golborne link at this stage, because the principle of the Bill is agreed on Second Reading.

Gavin Newlands: I hear what the Minister is saying about the Golborne link, but how much slower will a train from Glasgow to London be without it?

Andrew Stephenson: Potentially there is no detriment whatsoever to Scotland, because we have said that we are only removing that link to look at alternatives. One alternative is to upgrade the existing west coast main line, and other alternatives will be considered as part of the study. It is entirely possible that we could deliver a

better and faster journey time to Scotland as part of the removal of the Golborne link—something I am sure the hon. Gentleman would welcome, because the Scottish Government and the UK Government have a shared ambition to reduce journey times between London, and Glasgow and Edinburgh.

There is a motion on how habitats regulations should be dealt with in the Bill, and it would apply the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 to the parliamentary process. The Government's view is that there has already been extensive consultation on the environmental statement that accompanied the Bill. There were more than 6,000 responses to the consultation. That is reflected in the instruction to the Select Committee, which makes clear that it does not need to hold a further consultation specifically in relation to the habitats regulations. It is my view that the requirement has been satisfied in relation both to the Bill and to further consultations on any additional provisions.

I draw particular attention to the carry-over motion. This is a more extensive motion than the House is used to seeing. That is because hybrid Bills take much longer than normal Public Bills, and the aim is to save parliamentary time. I trust that the House will give its support to all those motions this evening.

Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con): I thank the Minister for inviting me to view the HS2 site at Old Oak Common last week, where I was able to see first hand how HS2 Ltd and its contractors are learning lessons as they go along. There is every chance that when we come to the Crewe to Manchester leg, it will be more impressive, reliable and sustainable than phase 1. Will the Minister outline what conversations are happening about proceeding with an eastern leg of HS2, which would greatly benefit my constituents in Broxtowe?

Andrew Stephenson: My hon. Friend remains a strong champion for his constituency and region. As he will know, as part of the integrated rail plan we said that we will build a first phase of the eastern leg from the west midlands to East Midlands Parkway, and we will then consult on how we are taking trains from East Midlands Parkway to Leeds. That is in addition to the study we are undertaking on the Toton site in his constituency, looking at maximising regeneration and development opportunities in that area to supply the maximum number of jobs and benefits for his constituents.

I turn to the points made in the substantive speeches in the debate, starting with the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi). I welcome Labour's ongoing support for the Bill. I remain keen to continue to work with him and his colleagues to ensure that as the Bill passes through this House, we continue to make the right decisions to deliver maximum levelling-up benefits across the country. He says that the project has been watered down so much that it has become a ghost, but I am not sure how many ghosts employ 26,000 people. We are keen to get on with delivering this project, which started under Labour, but which we have gripped and started to make real progress on. There is not a choice here—it is not either/or; we are investing in the conventional rail network at the same time as investing in high-speed rail services. The trans-Pennine route upgrade is the biggest investment across the whole country in the conventional network, and it is taking place in the north of England.

Philip Davies: Does it not trouble the Minister that he is getting such wholehearted support from the spendthrifts on the Opposition Benches? Does the fact that they are so happy to see taxpayer money thrown about with gay abandon not worry him, and does it not make him think that actually this is not a Conservative thing to be proceeding with?

Andrew Stephenson: My hon. Friend remains consistent in his views on the HS2 programme, but I would be happy to remind the House that in addition to that cross-party support, the Second Readings of the legislation for phases 1 and 2a secured some of the biggest majorities this House has seen in recent years. The project has significant support on the Conservative Benches and the Opposition Benches.

Dr Mullan: I rise to assure the Minister that there is plenty of gay abandon in support on the Government Benches, too.

Andrew Stephenson: Excellent. I could not make the point better myself.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) talked about the business case and whether there was still demand for the HS2 programme. It is worth emphasising that the delivery into service for the Crewe to Manchester section is 2035 to 2041. We have a lot of time for post-pandemic recovery in demand for our rail services. He also talked about the debate around the location of the railhead and the Stone infrastructure maintenance base. I am keen to continue to work with him and his constituents on that issue, and I look forward to visiting his constituency soon to meet some of those residents and to see what more we can do.

The SNP spokesman, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) also spoke. I welcome the SNP's continuing support for the HS2 programme. This Bill is the first Bill that will create infrastructure in Scotland, and 100 permanent jobs will be created at the new depot in Dumfries and Galloway. The Golborne decision is certainly not a betrayal of Scotland, and the shared ambition remains for us to reduce journey times between London, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) has been a consistent critic of the project and its business case, which I appreciate will have significant impacts on her constituency. In terms of cost increases, the budget for HS2 was set following the Oakervee review in February 2020. Since then we have remained within budget. My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) asked when HS2 would cost so much that it would be scrapped. I simply say this: we keep the project costs under constant review. We are constantly looking to make cost savings and efficiencies, and I report not just on the budget but on any emerging cost pressures in my six-monthly reports to Parliament. We are fully open and transparent about cost pressures emerging on the project.

I understand that there are many line-of-route constituencies where MPs are concerned about the benefits they will receive. I am pleased to announce that we will be increasing the amount of community funding available by £10 million to the HS2 community and environment fund and the HS2 business and local economy fund.

That extra funding will help renew community facilities used by residents between Crewe and Manchester, contribute to vital community services to help improve community health and wellbeing, and support local environmental projects.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con): The Minister will be aware of the construction work going on in the beautiful village of Balsall Common in my constituency. For many years, HS2 Ltd's contact has left a lot to be desired. It ignored my constituents' requests to minimise disruption to the point that a country lane normally used by school kids and families will now be used for hundreds of lorry movements. Does he agree that the residents of Balsall Common deserve greater respect? Will he agree to meet me to discuss how we can get through this problem together?

Andrew Stephenson: My hon. Friend and I have met several times on this issue. I am keen to meet him again and continue to work with him to address the challenge of respecting the challenges local residents face while delivering this transformational project.

It is worth me focusing on Manchester Piccadilly underground station, as the hon. Members for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) and for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer), and my hon. Friends the Members for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) and for High Peak (Robert Lorgan) all mentioned this one issue. There has been extensive engagement with stakeholders on the underground station. Following three years of engagement between HS2 Ltd and Greater Manchester stakeholders, the Secretary of State proposed a four-platform overground station in January 2013. That was followed by a formal consultation in January 2013 and in 2016 a further design refinement consultation on proposed changes around Piccadilly was also announced. As the same time as the 2016 consultation, the Government provided funding for Greater Manchester to create a growth strategy for the Piccadilly area. Between 2017 and 2018, the Government again worked extensively with Greater Manchester partners to refine the options.

The Government have always been clear that there needed to be a strong business case to justify the extra spending on an underground station, because we always believed that it would be the more expensive option. The Bechtel report, commissioned by Manchester City Council, was one example of making the case for an underground station. The Government, however, felt that there was no new information in the 2019 Bechtel report, with nothing to change the Government's fundamental conclusion that a surface station design can cope with the full capacity of the HS2 line and that the underground station option remained hugely more expensive to deliver. In June 2020, I commissioned HS2 to investigate further options on the underground alternative.

Graham Stringer: I am grateful that the Minister has listened attentively and is answering some of the points, although not to my satisfaction. Will he do two things? Will he meet a delegation of the Greater Manchester MPs who have spoken in this debate to discuss the matter further? Secondly, I think he dismisses the Bechtel report too quickly. Will he agree, after a discussion, to commission a report that looks at the cost of the opportunities lost by not having an underground station?

Andrew Stephenson: I thank the hon. Member for that point. We did not believe that the Bechtel report was convincing, but I was happy to do further work and have done further work since then. I will briefly mention the further study I commissioned at the request of the Mayor and others, because I believe that is important information, and then we can perhaps talk about a way forward.

In June 2020, I commissioned HS2 to investigate. By September 2020, HS2 Ltd, the Department for Transport, Transport for the North, Transport for Greater Manchester and Manchester City Council had agreed the scope for the work to look at a like-for-like comparison between a surface station and an underground alternative. In summer 2021, HS2 Ltd was commissioned to undertake that like-for-like study to compare the underground station alternatives to the surface station. HS2 looked at not only one alternative, but three possible alternative solutions for an underground station. HS2 Ltd worked closely with Transport for Greater Manchester, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Transport for the North at every stage of the study. From developing the scope of the work to selecting the underground options they considered, they ensured that they represented the best alternative underground designs. That study concluded in August 2021. It recommended that the Government proceed with the surface station for the HS2 Crewe to Manchester scheme. We confirmed our intention for a six-platform surface station when we deposited the Bill in January.

Based on the report's findings, I am absolutely confident that a surface station design will deliver what Manchester needs at a lower cost and with a lower construction impact than underground alternatives. The study has been shared with Manchester stakeholders. The Government intend to publish the report shortly, to allow everyone to have sight of the work undertaken and compare the alternative underground design options with the surface station. My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton asked whether I could put a copy in the Library; I am more than happy to commit to doing so.

Andrew Gwynne: We are at an impasse here, because Greater Manchester MPs disagree fundamentally with the Minister, the Greater Manchester Mayor disagrees fundamentally with the Minister, and the 10 councils of Greater Manchester disagree fundamentally with the Minister. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) suggested a meeting to try to break the impasse. Will the Minister agree to that meeting?

Andrew Stephenson: I am more than happy to agree to that meeting. I am sure that the Select Committee will also want to look at all the options for Piccadilly and the proposals put forward by stakeholders. I am more than happy to meet, but I am sure that this debate will continue. Given the shortness of time, I will jump over the hon. Member's contribution about Metrolink, but we have met several times and I am happy to continue to work with him to ensure that we deliver this in a sensible fashion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) made some incredibly supportive comments about the Bill. He can be especially proud that the historic railway works in his constituency will help to deliver the HS2 rolling stock contract.

I thank the hon. Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) for his support and for speaking so eloquently in favour of more investment in rail infrastructure. We are learning lessons from Crossrail about project management and various other things; one of the first meetings that I had in the Department was with the outgoing chairman of Crossrail.

Matt Rodda: Will the Minister meet me and other Berkshire and west London MPs to look at local issues relating to Old Oak Common, the western rail link and other matters in our area?

Andrew Stephenson: I am very happy to commit to that meeting. We have to continue to learn lessons from Crossrail and other major transport investments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton made some great comments about focusing on capacity, and about the benefits that will come from doubling the capacity between Manchester and London. I welcome his support for removing Golborne from the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Dr Davies) spoke about the benefits to Wales, particularly north Wales, and about Growth Track 360. I can tell him that we hope that RNEP will be published soon, and that the response to the Union connectivity review will be published soon. I am happy to continue to work with him on all the issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) has been a consistent opponent of HS2 and has spent a huge amount of his time raising his constituents' concerns. I thank him again for the time that he took to raise those issues directly with me when I visited his constituency. I am keen to follow up on many of the issues that he raised today. I am also pleased that the new residents' commissioner, Stewart Jackson, recently visited my hon. Friend's seat.

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak spoke about the need to focus on long-term investment. He is completely right: we must not underestimate the importance of freight. HS2 will free up existing rail lines to deliver greater freight capacity across the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (James Grundy) has without doubt been the strongest opponent of the Golborne link over many years. I pay tribute to his campaigning work on the issue. Given his support for the action that we have taken to remove the Golborne link from the Bill, I hope that he will support the Bill's Second Reading tonight.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter) talked about the benefits to Warrington of the £96 billion integrated rail plan. It is important to remind the House that that is the biggest ever Government investment in our railways. I also thank him for his support for removing the Golborne link from the Bill.

I am very proud to have been born in Manchester, and I am very proud of the railway history of Manchester. Almost two centuries ago, the first train locomotive ran from Manchester. We have come a long way since those days of the early steam trains. It is only right that now, 193 years later, we make progress to bring high-speed rail to the people of that great city.

Through the Bill, we will strengthen the connectivity between Manchester and Birmingham, more than halving the time by rail. Capacity will be increased, improving

[Andrew Stephenson]

journey times on rail routes across the north. Above all, the Bill will bring prosperity and growth to the north, helping to deliver our commitment to level up the country. I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 205, Noes 6.

Division No. 016]

[9.39 pm

AYES

Afolami, Bim	Evans, Dr Luke
Afriyie, Adam	Everitt, Ben
Aiken, Nickie	Farris, Laura
Aldous, Peter	Fell, Simon
Allan, Lucy	Firth, Anna
Anderson, Lee	Fletcher, Katherine
Andrew, rh Stuart	Fletcher, Mark
Ansell, Caroline	Fletcher, Nick
Argar, Edward	Ford, Vicky
Atherton, Sarah	Foster, Kevin
Atkins, Victoria	Fox, rh Dr Liam
Bailey, Shaun	Frazer, rh Lucy
Baynes, Simon	Freeman, George
Bell, Aaron	French, Mr Louie
Benton, Scott	Fuller, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul	Fysh, Mr Marcus
Bhatti, Saqib	Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Blackman, Bob	Gibb, rh Nick
Blunt, Crispin	Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Graham, Richard
Bowie, Andrew	Gray, James
Braverman, rh Suella	Green, Chris
Brereton, Jack	Green, rh Damian
Brine, Steve	Griffith, Andrew
Bristow, Paul	Gullis, Jonathan
Britcliffe, Sara	Hall, Luke
Browne, Anthony	Hancock, rh Matt
Buchan, Felicity	Hands, rh Greg
Burghart, Alex	Harris, Rebecca
Cairns, rh Alun	Hart, Sally-Ann
Carter, Andy	Hayes, rh Sir John
Cartlidge, James	Henderson, Gordon
Caulfield, Maria	Henry, Darren
Chalk, Alex	Higginbotham, Antony
Chishti, Rehman	Hinds, rh Damian
Churchill, Jo	Holden, Mr Richard
Clarke, rh Mr Simon	Hollinrake, Kevin
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Holmes, Paul
Clarkson, Chris	Huddleston, Nigel
Cleverly, rh James	Hudson, Dr Neil
Colburn, Elliot	Hughes, Eddie
Collins, Damian	Hunt, Jane
Coutinho, Claire	Hunt, rh Jeremy
Crosbie, Virginia	Hunt, Tom
Daly, James	Jenkinson, Mark
Davies, Dr James	Jenrick, rh Robert
Davies, Mims	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah	Johnson, Gareth
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Johnston, David
Docherty, Leo	Jones, Andrew
Double, Steve	Jones, rh Mr David
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Jones, Fay
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Jones, Mr Marcus
Duddridge, James	Keegan, Gillian
Duguid, David	Kruger, Danny
Dunne, rh Philip	Lamont, John
Edwards, Ruth	Largan, Robert
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Lewer, Andrew
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie	Loder, Chris

Logan, Mark	Russell, Dean
Longhi, Marco	Rutley, David
Lord, Mr Jonathan	Sambrook, Gary
Mackrory, Cherylyn	Saxby, Selaine
Maclean, Rachel	Scully, Paul
Mak, Alan	Selous, Andrew
Mangnall, Anthony	Shannon, Jim
Mann, Scott	Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Marson, Julie	Skidmore, rh Chris
Mayhew, Jerome	Smith, Chloe
Maynard, Paul	Spencer, Dr Ben
McCartney, Jason	Spencer, rh Mark
Menzies, Mark	Stephenson, Andrew
Merriman, Huw	Stevenson, Jane
Millar, Robin	Stevenson, John
Miller, rh Dame Maria	Stewart, rh Bob
Milling, rh Amanda	Stewart, Iain
Mills, Nigel	Stride, rh Mel
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Sturdy, Julian
Mohindra, Mr Gagan	Syms, Sir Robert
Moore, Robbie	Throup, Maggie
Mordaunt, rh Penny	Tomlinson, Justin
Morris, James	Tomlinson, Michael
Mortimer, Jill	Trott, Laura
Morton, Wendy	Vara, Shailesh
Mullan, Dr Kieran	Vickers, Martin
Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Vickers, Matt
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew	Walker, Mr Robin
Nici, Lia	Wallis, Dr Jamie
O'Brien, Neil	Warman, Matt
Offord, Dr Matthew	Watling, Giles
Pawsey, Mark	Webb, Suzanne
Penning, rh Sir Mike	Whately, Helen
Penrose, John	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Percy, Andrew	Whittaker, Craig
Pincher, rh Christopher	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Pritchard, rh Mark	Wiggin, Sir Bill
Pursglove, Tom	Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Quin, Jeremy	Wood, Mike
Quince, Will	Young, Jacob
Randall, Tom	
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob	
Richards, Nicola	
Richardson, Angela	
Robinson, Mary	

Tellers for the Ayes:
Amanda Solloway and
David T. C. Davies

NOES

Cash, Sir William	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Hollobone, Mr Philip	Tellers for the Noes:
McVey, rh Esther	Philip Davies and
Smith, Greg	Mr Peter Bone

Question accordingly agreed to.

**HIGH SPEED RAIL
(CREWE - MANCHESTER) BILL (MONEY)**

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(1) any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of the Act, and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—
(*Heather Wheeler.*)

Question agreed to.

Business of the House (Today)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That in respect of the Motions in the name of Secretary Grant Shapps relating to

(1) the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill; and

(2) Positions for which additional salaries are payable for the purposes of section 4A(2) of the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings not later than one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order (notwithstanding, in respect of item (2) above, the provisions of paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 16); such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

9.53 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): This is a small but important procedural point, and I could be corrected later on, but it seems to me that this Business of the House motion says that four very complicated provisions relating to HS2 have to be put within one and a half hours. This is contrary to standing orders. If a number of colleagues and I wanted to look into this matter for more than one and a half hours, the Government's business would never be got to today. If we look at the motion, the Government propose to ignore Standing Order No. 16, which requires a one and a half hour debate on motions, not a one and a half hour debate from when the business of the House motion is moved. This is a trick that Governments of the day have been using for a number of years.

Tonight's debate is perhaps not of the utmost importance, but if motions are tabled for a one and a half hour debate and there are questions about whether the motions should have been tabled, about the method and about whether the time should be extended, discussing the business of the House motion would eat into the one and a half hours. However long I have talked for will be knocked off the one and a half hours. I could go through each of these motions.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Go on, Peter.

Mr Bone: My hon. Friend may want to bring this up afterwards, but the motions are very complicated and it might take the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson), at least an hour and a half to explain to the House what on earth they mean. Perhaps he does not know—I do not know—as they are extremely complicated.

This is not about that, really. I am trying to complain about the Government's habit of tabling business of the House motions to eat into the time for debate so that anyone with a concern about the procedure who speaks to the business of the House motion is hurting the people who want to talk about the actual issue.

Will the Leader of the House tell us that, in future, the Government will stick to the Standing Orders and allow a proper one and a half hour debate after the business of the House motion has been decided upon? It is a small but important part of our democracy that the Government do not tweak our Standing Orders to their own advantage.

We have a great Leader of the House, and he does not need to detain the House much longer. Will he just say that this will not happen in future?

9.57 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mark Spencer): I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) recognises that the Government would be in listening mode in the circumstances he describes. Where there is some excitement about the amount of time for debate, the Government would take that into consideration and would be more generous with their time.

I think it unlikely that we will spend the next hour and 20 minutes debating this business of the House motion. We will then get to the main business, and I am sure all will be well on this occasion. Should things be more excitable in future, I am sure we would be in listening mode.

Question put and agreed to.

High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill: Committal

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): The five motions on high-speed rail—motions 4 to 8 on the Order Paper—will be debated together. The debate may therefore range over all five motions. I should inform the House that Mr Speaker has selected manuscript amendments (a) and (b) to motion 6, tabled by Yvonne Fovargue. The manuscript amendments are available in the Vote Office and online.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

(1) That the Bill be committed to a Select Committee of seven members, all of whom are to be nominated by the Committee of Selection.

(2) That in determining the composition of the Select Committee the Committee of Selection shall nominate four members from the Government and three members from opposition parties.

(3) That there shall stand referred to the Select Committee—

- (a) any petition against the Bill submitted to the Private Bill Office during the period beginning at 9.00 am on 21 June 2022 and ending at 5.00 pm on 4 August 2022, and
- (b) any petition which has been submitted to the Private Bill Office and in which the petitioners complain of—
 - (i) any amendment as proposed in the filled-up Bill,
 - (ii) any amendment as proposed by the member in charge of the Bill which, if the Bill were a private bill, could not be made except upon petition for additional provision, or
 - (iii) any matter which has arisen during the progress of the Bill before the Select Committee,

(and references in this paragraph to the submission of a petition are to its submission electronically, by post or in person).

(4) That, notwithstanding the practice of the House that appearances on petitions against an opposed private bill be required to be entered at the first meeting of the Select Committee on the Bill, in the case of any such petitions as are mentioned in paragraph (3) (a) above on which appearances are not entered at that meeting, the Select Committee shall appoint a later day or days on which it will require appearances on those petitions to be entered.

(5) That any petitioners whose petitions stand referred to the Select Committee shall, subject to the rules and orders of the House, be entitled to be heard upon their petition by themselves, their counsel, representatives or parliamentary agents provided that the petition is prepared in conformity with the rules and orders of the House; and the member in charge of the Bill shall be entitled to be heard through counsel or agents in favour of the Bill against any such petition.

(6) That the Select Committee shall require any hearing in relation to a petition mentioned in paragraph (5) above to take place in person, unless exceptional circumstances apply.

(7) That in applying the rules of the House in relation to parliamentary agents, any reference to a petitioner in person shall be treated as including a reference to a duly authorised member or officer of an organisation, group or body.

(8) That the Select Committee have power to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place and to report from day to day the minutes of evidence taken before it.

(9) That the Select Committee have power to make special reports from time to time.

(10) That three be the quorum of the Select Committee.—
(*Andrew Stephenson.*)

Mr Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Motion 5—High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill: Instruction—

That it be an instruction to the Select Committee to which the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill is committed to deal with the Bill as follows—

(1) The Committee shall—

- (a) make an appropriate assessment, in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (“the 2017 Regulations”), of the implications for a site within paragraph (2) of the provisions made in relation to the site by the Bill in view of the site’s conservation objectives, and
- (b) make a recommendation to the House in relation to whether those provisions adversely affect the integrity of the site.

(2) The following sites are within this paragraph—

- (a) the Rochdale Canal special area of conservation, and
- (b) a site to which paragraph (3) applies that the Committee determines, in accordance with the 2017 Regulations, is likely to be significantly affected by a provision of the Bill.

(3) This paragraph applies to a European site (within the meaning of the 2017 Regulations) in relation to which—

- (a) an amendment has been proposed by the member in charge of the Bill which, if the Bill were a private bill, could not be made except upon petition for additional provision, or
- (b) the Committee has been provided with additional information by the promoters after the date of this instruction.

(4) For the purposes of making an assessment under paragraph (1) or a determination under paragraph (2)(b), the Committee may require the promoters to provide the Committee with such information as the Committee may reasonably require.

(5) For the purposes of making an assessment under paragraph (1), the Committee—

- (a) must consult the relevant nature conservation body and have regard to any representations made by the body within such reasonable time as the Committee specifies;
- (b) is not required to consult the general public.

(6) In paragraph (5)(a), the “relevant nature conservation body” means—

- (a) in relation to a site in England, Natural England, and
- (b) in relation to a site in Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage.

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.

Motion 6—High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill: Instruction (No. 2)—

That it be an instruction to the Select Committee to which the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill is committed to deal with the Bill as follows:

(1) The Committee shall, before concluding its proceedings, amend the Bill by—

- (a) leaving out provision relating to the railway between Hoo Green in Cheshire and a junction with the West Coast Main Line at Bamfurlong, south of Wigan, except for a spur from Hoo Green to the Parish of High Legh in Cheshire, and
- (b) making such amendments to the Bill as it thinks fit in consequence of the amendments made by virtue of sub-paragraph (a).

(2) The Committee shall not hear any petition to the extent that it relates to whether or not there should be a railway between Hoo Green in Cheshire and a junction with the West Coast Main Line at Bamfurlong, south of Wigan.

(3) The Committee shall treat the principle of the Bill, as determined by the House on the Bill's Second Reading, as comprising the matters mentioned in paragraph 4; and those matters shall accordingly not be at issue during proceedings of the Committee.

(4) The matters referred to in paragraph (3) are—

- (a) the provision of a high speed railway between a junction with Phase 2a of High Speed 2 south of Crewe in Cheshire and Manchester Piccadilly Station,
- (b) in relation to the railway set out on the plans deposited in January 2022 in connection with the Bill in the office of the Clerk of the Parliaments and the Private Bill Office of the House of Commons, its broad route alignment, and
- (c) the fact that there are to be no new stations (other than Manchester Piccadilly and Manchester Airport) on, or spurs (other than the spur from Hoo Green to the Parish of High Legh) from, the railway mentioned in sub-paragraph (b).

(5) The Committee shall have power to consider any amendments proposed by the member in charge of the Bill which, if the Bill were a private bill, could not be made except upon petition for additional provision.

(6) Paragraph (5) applies only so far as the amendments proposed by the member in charge of the Bill fall within the principle of the Bill as provided for by paragraphs (3) and (4) above.

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.

Manuscript amendment (a) to motion 6: Leave out paragraphs (1) and (2).

Manuscript amendment (b) to motion 6: In paragraph (4)(c), leave out

“, or spurs (other than the spur from Hoo Green to the Parish of High Legh) from,”.

Motion 7—*High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill: Carry-Over—*

That the following provisions shall apply in respect of the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill:

Suspension at end of current Session

(1) Further proceedings on the Bill shall be suspended from the day on which this Session of Parliament ends (“the current Session”) until the next Session of Parliament (“Session 2023–24”).

(2) If a Bill is presented in Session 2023–24 in the same terms as those in which the Bill stood when proceedings on it were suspended in the current Session—

- (a) the Bill so presented shall be ordered to be printed and shall be deemed to have been read the first and second time;
- (b) the Standing Orders and practice of the House applicable to the Bill, so far as complied with or dispensed with in the current Session or in the previous Session of Parliament (“Session 2021–22”), shall be deemed to have been complied with or (as the case may be) dispensed with in Session 2023–24;
- (c) any resolution relating to the Habitats Regulations that is passed by the House in the current Session in relation to the Bill shall be deemed to have been passed by the House in Session 2023–24;
- (d) the Bill shall be dealt with in accordance with—
 - (i) paragraph (3), if proceedings in Select Committee were not completed when proceedings on the Bill were suspended,
 - (ii) paragraph (4), if proceedings in Public Bill Committee were begun but not completed when proceedings on the Bill were suspended,
 - (iii) paragraph (5), if the Bill was waiting to be considered when proceedings on it were suspended,
 - (iv) paragraph (6), if the Bill was waiting for third reading when proceedings on it were suspended, or
 - (v) paragraph (7), if the Bill has been read the third reading time and sent to the House of Lords.

(3) If this paragraph applies—

- (a) the Bill shall stand committed to a Select Committee of such Members as were members of the Committee when proceedings on the Bill were suspended in the current Session;
- (b) any instruction of the House to the Committee in the current Session shall be an instruction to the Committee on the Bill in Session 2023–24;
- (c) all petitions submitted in the current Session which stand referred to the Committee and which have not been withdrawn, and any petition submitted between the day on which the current Session ends and the day on which proceedings on the Bill are resumed in Session 2023–24 in accordance with this Order, shall stand referred to the Committee in Session 2023–24;
- (d) any minutes of evidence taken and any papers laid before the Committee in the current Session shall stand referred to the Committee in Session 2023–24;
- (e) only those petitions mentioned in sub-paragraph (c), and any petition which may be submitted to the Private Bill Office and in which the petitioners complain of any amendment proposed by the member in charge of the Bill which, if the Bill were a private bill, could not be made except upon petition for additional provision or of any matter which has arisen during the progress of the Bill before the Committee in Session 2023–24, shall stand referred to the Committee;
- (f) any petitioners whose petitions stand referred to the Committee in Session 2023–24 shall, subject to the rules and orders of the House, be entitled to be heard upon their petition by themselves, their counsel, representatives or parliamentary agents provided that the petition is prepared and signed in conformity with the rules and orders of the House; and the Member in charge of the Bill shall be entitled to be heard through counsel or agents in favour of the Bill against any such petition;
- (g) the Committee shall require any hearing in relation to a petition mentioned in sub-paragraph (f) above to take place in person, unless exceptional circumstances apply;
- (h) in applying the rules of the House in relation to parliamentary agents, any reference to a petitioner in person shall be treated as including a reference to a duly authorised member or officer of an organisation, group or body;
- (i) the Committee shall have power to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from day to day minutes of evidence taken before it;
- (j) the Committee shall have power to make special reports from time to time;
- (k) three shall be the quorum of the Committee.

(4) If this paragraph applies, the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and to have been re-committed to a Public Bill Committee.

(5) If this paragraph applies—

- (a) the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and from the Public Bill Committee, and
- (b) the Bill shall be set down as an order of the day for consideration.

(6) If this paragraph applies—

- (a) the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and from the Public Bill Committee and to have been considered, and
- (b) the Bill shall be set down as an order of the day for third reading.

(7) If this paragraph applies, the Bill shall be deemed to have passed through all its stages in this House.

Suspension at end of this Parliament

(8) If proceedings on the Bill are resumed in accordance with paragraph 2 but are not completed before the end of Session 2023–24, further proceedings on the Bill shall be suspended from the day on which that Session ends until the first Session of the next Parliament (“Session 2024–25”).

(9) If a Bill is presented in Session 2024–25 in the same terms as those in which the Bill stood when proceedings on it were suspended in Session 2023–24—

- (a) the Bill so presented shall be ordered to be printed and shall be deemed to have been read the first and second time;
- (b) the Standing Orders and practice of the House applicable to the Bill, so far as complied with or dispensed with in Session 2023–24 or in the current session or in Session 2021–22, shall be deemed to have been complied with or (as the case may be) dispensed with in Session 2024–25;
- (c) any resolution relating to the Habitats Regulations that is passed by the House in Session 2023–24 or in the current session in relation to the Bill shall be deemed to have been passed by the House in Session 2024–25;
- (d) the Bill shall be dealt with in accordance with—
 - (i) paragraph (10), if proceedings in Select Committee were not completed when proceedings on the Bill were suspended,
 - (ii) paragraph (11), if proceedings in Public Bill Committee were begun but not completed when proceedings on the Bill were suspended,
 - (iii) paragraph (12), if the Bill was waiting to be considered when proceedings on it were suspended,
 - (iv) paragraph (13), if the Bill was waiting for third when proceedings on it were suspended, or
 - (v) paragraph (14), if the Bill has been read the third time and sent to the House of Lords.

(10) If this paragraph applies—

- (a) the Bill shall stand committed to a Select Committee of such Members as were members of the Committee when proceedings on the Bill were suspended in Session 2023–24;
- (b) any instruction of the House to the Committee in the current Session or in Session 2023–24 shall be an instruction to the Committee on the Bill in Session 2024–25;
- (c) all petitions submitted in the current Session or in Session 2023–24 which stand referred to the Committee and which have not been withdrawn, and any petition submitted between the day on which the Session 2023–24 ends and the day on which proceedings on the Bill are resumed in Session 2024–25 in accordance with this Order, shall stand referred to the Committee in Session 2024–25;
- (d) any minutes of evidence taken and any papers laid before the Committee in Session 2023–24 or in the current session shall stand referred to the Committee in Session 2024–25;
- (e) only those petitions mentioned in sub-paragraph (c), and any petition which may be submitted to the Private Bill Office and in which the petitioners complain of any amendment proposed by the member in charge of the Bill which, if the Bill were a private bill, could not be made except upon petition for additional provision or of any matter which has arisen during the progress of the Bill before the Committee in Session 2024–25, shall stand referred to the Committee;
- (f) any petitioners whose petitions stand referred to the Committee in Session 2024–25 shall, subject to the rules and orders of the House, be entitled to be heard upon their petition by themselves, their counsel, representatives or parliamentary agents provided that the petition is prepared and signed in conformity

with the rules and orders of the House; and the Member in charge of the Bill shall be entitled to be heard through counsel or agents in favour of the Bill against any such petition;

- (g) the Committee shall require any hearing in relation to a petition mentioned in sub-paragraph (f) above to take place in person, unless exceptional circumstances apply;
- (h) in applying the rules of the House in relation to parliamentary agents, any reference to a petitioner in person shall be treated as including a reference to a duly authorised member or officer of an organisation, group or body;
- (i) the Committee shall have power to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from day to day minutes of evidence taken before it;
- (j) the Committee shall have power to make special reports from time to time;
- (k) three shall be the quorum of the Committee.

(11) If this paragraph applies, the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and to have been re-committed to a Public Bill Committee.

(12) If this paragraph applies—

- (a) the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and from the Public Bill Committee, and
- (b) the Bill shall be set down as an order of the day for consideration.

(13) If this paragraph applies—

- (a) the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and from the Public Bill Committee and to have been considered, and
- (b) the Bill shall be set down as an order of the day for third reading.

(14) If this paragraph applies, the Bill shall be deemed to have passed through all its stages in this House.

Other

(15) In paragraphs (1) and (8) above, references to further proceedings do not include proceedings under Standing Order 224A(8) (deposit of supplementary environmental information).

(16) In paragraphs (3) and (10) above, references to the submission of a petition are to its submission electronically, by post or in person.

(17) In paragraphs (2) and (9) above, references to the Habitats Regulations are to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.

Motion 8—High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill Select Committee: Additional Salaries—

That the Order of the House of 19 March 2013 (Positions for which additional salaries are payable for the purposes of section 4A(2) of the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009) be amended, in paragraph (1)(a), by inserting, in the appropriate place, “the Select Committee on the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill”.

9.58 pm

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): My manuscript amendments seek to extend the discussion on the Golborne spur and to allow petitions relating to this link to be heard by the Committee, as I do not believe the full facts have been taken into account by the premature and ill-informed decision to remove the link and to explore alternatives that deliver similar, although I would say inferior, benefits within the £96 billion envelope of the Government’s integrated rail plan.

HS2 phase 2b, Crewe to Manchester, including the Golborne link, will cost £17 billion at 2019 prices. The proposed removal of the Golborne link is expected to reduce costs by approximately £3 billion. The Government committed to publish a supplement to the January 2022 strategic outline business case for HS2 phase 2b to set out the implications of removing the Golborne link ahead of the Second Reading, but that has only just been published. How can a reasonable decision be made without full and costed alternatives that allow time for full consideration of the implications for all, especially those in my borough of Wigan? It does state that it will deliver benefits sooner to Manchester and the north-west, but it is pretty difficult to see the benefits that will be delivered to Wigan, and to Lancashire and Cumbria.

The January 2014 update to the business case for HS2 included a

“without link to the West Coast Mainline”

sensitivity test, which showed a benefit-cost ratio of 0.7, which equates to gaining £7 billion of benefits from spending £10 billion. The benefit-cost ratio with the Golborne link is 1.2. It is difficult to understand how the Golborne link can be considered a “white elephant” and its removal a

“worthwhile saving of taxpayers’ money”

on that basis. The environmental statement included an alternatives report, which considered a wide range of alternatives for the western leg of HS2 phase 2b, before arriving at a shortlist and then a clear preference for the Golborne link as part of HS2 phase 2b.

One alternative that was considered, and is clearly now back on the table, is the upgrade of the west coast main line north of Crewe. Parts of the west coast main line between Crewe and Wigan are heavily congested, notably the section between Winsford and Weaver in Cheshire, including the Weaver junction. That section is twin track for the majority of its length and is used by long-distance services between Scotland, Liverpool and London, inter-regional services between Liverpool and Birmingham, and freight services. It is already constraining service improvement. This alternative option would include partial four-tracking of the Weaver junction, the provision of an alternative freight route via Sandbach and substantial grade separation between Crewe and Preston. Upgrading the west coast main line was found to deliver faster journey times compared with the existing situation. However, they do not match the journey time benefits provided by the Golborne link, which would deliver substantially faster journey times between cities in the north and the midlands, as is set out on page 20 of the alternatives report.

Both the upgrade of the west coast main line and the Golborne link were found to create extra capacity on the national conventional rail network for other services. However, only the Golborne link would create extra capacity for potential high-speed services north of Birmingham, and would therefore better meet the Government’s strategic objectives for HS2. So without the Golborne link there is a fundamental concern that provision for additional high-speed services north of Birmingham would be to the detriment of local and regional services, and freight services, which would need to be removed or reduced, or at the very least would remain constrained against their potential for growth, including in response to any carbon reduction challenges. This alternative option would also result in years of

significant disruption to passengers and freight on the west coast main line compared with building a new railway. The Government have suggested that a solution could be delivered more quickly than the Golborne link, but we have not got any evidence for that. Given that they have made similar claims in removing the eastern leg of HS2 and in downgrading Northern Powerhouse Rail, in preference to upgrading existing lines, there is not enough capacity in the industry to do all of this work, and there is also the time constraint in working around live railways to consider. Even if there was, it is not possible to close different routes at the same time to facilitate the work without causing widespread disruption. Instead, it is highly likely to take much longer than building a new railway.

This alternative option would also be more expensive than the Golborne link, as the works needed between Crewe and Wigan would be of a similar scale to those needed between Wigan and Preston to accommodate the high-speed trains. That is likely to cost in the region of £5 billion to 10 billion—and that is the estimate from Network Rail. On that basis, the cost of upgrading the west coast main line between Crewe and Wigan will exceed the £3 billion needed for the Golborne link by around £7 million.

It is pertinent for the Wigan borough that the loss of the Golborne link will be to the detriment of the service provision at the proposed new rail station at Golborne, which is on the west coast main line south of the proposed junction with HS2. Significant capacity enhancements to the west coast main line between Warrington and Wigan, particularly around the junction with the Chat Moss line, would be needed if that station was to be served by the stopping trains without disrupting the high-speed through services. In the absence of the Golborne link, they will all pass through that location.

The report also considered a connection to the west coast main line north of Preston, near Brock. It would be 46 km in length as an extension to the Golborne link north of Lowton. It would pass close to a number of communities, including Hindley and Ince-in-Makerfield, as well as numerous other communities in Lancashire, and would require an elevated crossing of the River Ribble and a new parkway station west of Preston. That would clearly mean additional noise and visual and landscape impacts that would all need to be mitigated. A further 63 demolitions would be needed, it would impact the setting of up to three scheduled monuments and up to six grade II listed buildings, and it would impact on two ancient woodlands.

Preston City Council did not support the need for a new parkway station on the outskirts of Preston, instead favouring investment in the regeneration of the existing city centre station. Although such a connection would deliver journey-time improvements between London and Glasgow, it was considered that the benefits gained from the journey-time savings and new markets did not outweigh the substantial costs and additional sustainability impacts. It was therefore determined that this alternative option did not deliver sufficient economic or journey-time benefits to offset the higher costs, sustainability impacts and lower regional connectivity.

Option 3 was a new connection to the south of Preston, on the basis that it would have the potential to deliver more benefits and reduce journey times by two to three minutes more than the Golborne link. As with

[Yvonne Fovargue]

the connection north of Preston, this would be an extension to the Golborne link north of Lowton. The alternatives report explored the recommendation in detail and determined that various connections to the west coast main line south of Preston performed less favourably in terms of construction complexity, sustainability and journey time when compared with the options connecting to the north of Preston. That was despite a shorter length of track.

There is a clear contradiction between the Union connectivity review and the alternatives report. A connection to the west coast main line south of Preston may deliver greater benefits than the Golborne link, but the feasibility of such a connection has been examined by HS2 across a number of locations and been deemed unsuitable for progression in favour of other options. It should be noted that any connection to the west coast main line south of Preston would in effect extend the Golborne link and cost significantly more than the link's £3 billion cost. It is also highly likely to cost more than the works that would otherwise be needed to accommodate high-speed trains on the west coast main line between Wigan and Preston, which Network Rail has advised would cost in the region of £5 billion to £10 billion.

There is another option. If Government chose to extend HS2 northwards, which currently seems unlikely, the council would want to retain the Golborne link connection to Wigan to avoid the borough being bypassed by HS2. This would need a junction with the extended route north of Lowton and the retention of that part of the Golborne link from that point to the west coast main line at Bamfurlong, which is a short length of around 3 km. The remainder of the Golborne link would be part of a longer link regardless. [Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Lady is making a serious speech. There are people sitting in this Chamber who are not whispering to one another but speaking as if they are in a normal evening conversation. If you are in the Chamber and someone else is speaking, it is polite to speak quietly to one another. I am not suggesting that there should be no conversations going on, but I should not be able to hear those conversations from the Chair.

Yvonne Fovargue: This is an important factor for Wigan, for my borough and for the people who live in my borough. It is important that we get HS2 right so that we get the economic benefits for all the north-west. In any such connection, the council would seek to progress the items that have been identified for petitioning on the Golborne link, to mitigate the adverse impacts of the proposals on local communities, including the proposal for a green tunnel at Lowton.

The Golborne link would free up capacity on the west coast main line for residual passenger services and rail freight and maximise the time that services can travel at high speed between London, Birmingham and Scotland, minimising end-to-end journey times. The significance of that is set out in the January 2022 update to the HS2 Phase 2b business case, which is explicit about the role of the Golborne link in unlocking capacity and services to Scotland. As the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) mentioned, this is important for Scotland, not just for Wigan.

The Golborne link also gives rise to the opportunity to connect to the Manchester spur and bring significantly improved journey times to Manchester airport and Manchester Piccadilly, avoiding the congested Castlefield corridor in central Manchester—from Wigan, the north-west and Scotland. Our services to Manchester Oxford Road are always under threat in Wigan. We have very poor transport links, and we will not even get a tram until 2040, so it is important that HS2 provides actual benefits for my borough.

At £3 billion, the Golborne spur is clearly cost-effective compared with the option of upgrading the west coast main line, and it could be delivered more quickly, with minimal disruption to passengers and freight on the existing rail network.

Sir Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): Is it the case that the Government are maintaining safeguarding on this route so that, if they change their minds in the future, this will still be able to go ahead?

Yvonne Fovargue: Indeed, safeguarding has been maintained, but there is no opportunity in the Select Committee to put forward the proposals to include the Golborne link. There is no opportunity to put a petition. Basically, debate has been stifled by this amendment, which is why I am objecting to it.

There are no alternatives that are cheaper than the Golborne link. In fact, it becomes more likely that phase 2b without the Golborne link will cost more than it delivers. There are no alternatives that can be delivered with less disruption to passengers and freight on the west coast main line than the Golborne link. There are no alternatives that can be delivered quicker than the Golborne link other than small-scale isolated improvements. Wigan Council has identified a number of measures that could easily be incorporated in the Golborne link that would substantially reduce the adverse impacts on local communities. Greenhouse gas emissions will be increased by removing the Golborne link.

The Government have insisted that any alternative should deliver the same benefits and outputs. There is no alternative to match the benefits at similar cost. As concluded in all the independent analyses that have taken place, the solution to all of this is the Golborne link. It is simply wrong to stifle debate by removing any possibility for the Select Committee to re-examine it and for people to petition for this. It is stifling debate. The land is still safeguarded and people are still blighted by it and yet we cannot even talk about it. That is why we need to re-examine it and local people, local councils and Transport for Greater Manchester all need to be able to have their say.

10.13 pm

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): There are three possible positions to take on the Golborne link. There is the position that my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) has just put very convincingly that it should still be able to be considered during the passage of the hybrid Bill and that one should be able to petition against it. She made the powerful case in support of it, not just the facility to talk about it.

There is a second case, which the hon. Member for Leigh (James Grundy) made in the previous debate, that there was significant disturbance to his constituents

and that on their behalf, which he is completely entitled to do as a constituency MP, he objects to the Golborne link. That is a completely reasonable position to take, although, when it comes to building high-speed lines that are good for a region or the whole country, it is inevitable that there is little immediate benefit for many constituents. It is the nature of high speed that it will go “whoosh” past a lot of places, and people will not be able to get the normal benefit they get from a train service by going to the local station. This is a particularly difficult project for national, and not local, benefit.

Sir Robert Goodwill: Is it not the case, though, that by having a high-speed network we will take the pressure off the existing Victorian network and allow more routes for passenger services and particularly for freight, which will help us to reduce our carbon footprint?

Graham Stringer: Absolutely right. I was talking about the inconvenience and disamenity there is to a local community. In many cases, they will not be able to get on the high-speed link, because it will have very few stations—if it had a lot of stations, that would defeat the objective of high speed. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) made a strong case against the whole of high speed 2, which, again, he is completely entitled to do. However, a previous Member for Buckinghamshire, Cheryl Gillan, managed to get a great deal of money out of the Government for tunnels under Buckinghamshire, and one point that could be made is that not only are we unable to discuss the link, but we will not be able to discuss amelioration of that route.

I am left with those two cases, put by my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield and the hon. Member for Leigh. The third case has not been put. We have not heard at all from the Minister about what the alternative is—just that he will have a look at it. That is a strange way for Government to do business. “We have a perfectly good line that will cause some disruption; we will not allow you to talk about it and we will not pursue it, but we don’t know what we’re going to do instead or how much it will cost.” That is not a good way for Government to do business.

I am left thinking that maybe there are other reasons, and I have two suspicions. One is that we suddenly get that change not because of the powers of persuasion of the hon. Member for Leigh, strong as they may be, but because of the desperation of a Prime Minister under pressure, wanting votes from his Back-Benchers before a vote of confidence within the parliamentary Conservative party. That may be over-cynical, although I suspect there is an element of truth to it. The other side of the argument is that this is not a cut of £3 billion that is waiting for another scheme yet to be specified by the Government, but simply a cut.

James Grundy: That is a very interesting theory from the hon. Gentleman that this decision was somehow buying me off. However, the problem is that my position is also the position of Labour-run Warrington Borough Council and the Labour Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols). This is immensely frustrating from my view, and I hope the hon. Gentleman would agree. He says that there has not been enough debate on the Golborne link, but we have been debating it for nearly 10 years. Is it not time for the suffering of my constituents to end?

Graham Stringer: I said there has not been enough debate. We have just had the Second Reading of the Crewe to Manchester hybrid Bill. There has been a great deal of debate all over the north-west about the link, particularly in Wigan and Leigh, but I was referring to debate in this Chamber, where it should be taking place and where, in the future, it will not be allowed because it is not part of the hybrid Bill.

It may or may not be coincidence that the decision was made. Other people from different political parties may agree with the hon. Member for Leigh, but if the Prime Minister wanted votes from the parliamentary Conservative party, he would not go to Wigan Council looking for those votes; he would go to his own Back-Benchers.

The second reason not to do with the Prime Minister is that this is simply about cuts. We saw £3 billion appear, and my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield made a persuasive argument that there is no cheaper option but only more expensive options. So, when they have spent time on this project from the very beginning, are the Government looking at ways of cutting it? Leeds and Yorkshire have lost out. Parts of the east-west link have gone. It looks to me as though, if it is not about votes for the Prime Minister, it is about cuts. I cannot see any real alternative explanation.

That brings me to an overall point that was also referred to by my hon. Friend. If one goes back 40 years to when this country first started looking at high-speed rail—I was a Manchester politician then, leader of the council, not a Member of Parliament—we were promised high-speed rail coming into Manchester Piccadilly when the cross-channel link was made, but it was cut. The trains were bought for that route. They used to say in French—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not speaking widely about the general concept, because we are not on the Second Reading debate now; we are very specifically debating motions 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. I have allowed him to range quite widely. However, I hope that he is not going to range too far as he should be speaking specifically to these motions, not making a Second Reading speech.

Graham Stringer: I am grateful for your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will now finish in two or three sentences. I was trying to make the point, while not extending the debate too widely, that over a long period there have been cuts to the original high-speed link and to this high-speed proposal that a Labour Government originally decided to take forward in 2010. We have had a long history of cuts. I think the most objective view of what is before us is that it is not a chance to look at an alternative, because there is no such chance within the hybrid Bill; it is another cut in a series that has gone on for a long time.

10.22 pm

Gavin Newlands: I rise briefly to put on record the SNP’s support for the comments by the hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue).

I made clear on Second Reading the Scottish Government’s displeasure on the Golborne link issue because the current position is total unsatisfactory.

[Gavin Newlands]

When I asked the Minister how much slower a journey from Glasgow to London would be without the Golborne link, an answer was not forthcoming, or certainly not a number, but the answer is that at least 20 minutes will be added to the journey. There is now a shared ambition to reduce journey times rather than anything definite, because the business case for HS2 from a Scottish perspective is massively weakened without the Golborne link or an effective replacement scheme. Call me a cynic, but I wonder whether we will ever see a replacement scheme, and if we do, just how much disruption to the west coast main line it will cause.

Just to be clear, there has been no consultation with the Scottish Government on the Golborne link and no notice about the change on the removal of the Golborne link, so we have an entirely unsatisfactory situation.

10.24 pm

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): First, I point out that the Minister may have inadvertently misled the House, because he said earlier from the Dispatch Box that a vote for the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) would be fatal for the Bill. I do not think that that would be the case given that the Bill has passed Second Reading. Perhaps he could correct that later for the record.

The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) has outlined the Scottish Government's position. The Opposition also believe that the Golborne link would free up capacity on the west coast main line for passengers and freight, and would maximise services that can travel at high speed between London and Scotland. As my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield pointed out, the significance of that was set out in the January 2022 update to the HS2 phase 2b business case.

We should have been informed in the House that the Golborne link was likely to be cancelled, but we actually learned about it in April when the media reported that the 1922 committee chairman, the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady) had been assured by the Transport Secretary in private that it would be scrapped. That builds further on the excellent points that were not quite cynical, but were sharply made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer). It is important that as many parts of the UK as possible reap the long-term benefits. Without the link, there will be a bottleneck on the already busy west coast main line.

The Government have said that we should give them time to propose alternatives now that they have decided to scrap the link, but surely they should have come up with those excellent alternatives before taking the current option off the table. The amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield is not fatal to the Bill and does not prevent us from deciding not to progress with the Golborne link in Committee or at a later date once all the Government's proposals have been fully considered and compared against the Golborne link. As the Government's proposals have not yet been published, or as is likely, even fully considered by the Government, we simply do not know what those alternatives will be or when they will be proposed.

If the Government are developing proposals at the rate at which they have been working on the annual rail network enhancements pipeline update, we could be waiting for decades—if they ever come at all. We know that the Government have a track record of promising rail projects that never actually transpire. I am getting quite sceptical that we will ever see an alternative to the Golborne link, but I hope that the Minister will allay my concerns.

This is the important point: the only reason that the Opposition would support the Golborne link not proceeding is if there is an excellent alternative proposal. I hope that I am proved wrong. The Government's motion binds the Committee's hands unnecessarily and prematurely. Surely, we should allow the Committee to undertake its work and then decide how best to link the west coast main line to HS2.

10.28 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): I start by addressing the comments of the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi). I do not recognise his comment that I said the amendment would be fatal to the Bill; it would not be, because the Bill has passed Second Reading. I hope that he will recognise that the last two HS2 hybrid Bills for phase 1 and phase 2a took around four years to pass through this place. If we were to keep the Golborne link in while the Government thought about and studied alternatives, and waited to make any progress until we had done that, we would probably be delaying the Bill by a further two years. I am not prepared to delay the delivery of benefits to people in Greater Manchester and across the north of England by a further two years. I think we need to get on with delivering the benefits of high-speed rail now.

The Union connectivity review set out that the Golborne link would not resolve all the rail capacity constraints between Crewe and Preston. We have therefore decided to look again at alternatives that would deliver similar benefits. The hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) made an eloquent case for some of the merits of the Golborne link, which has of course been a part of the Government's proposals up until now, but I hope that she will take into account and recognise the many speeches made on Second Reading by Members who do not support the Golborne link and support motion 6 to have the Golborne link deferred while we consider alternatives, including her fellow Wigan MP, my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (James Grundy). Members from her own side of the House who have not spoken today, including the hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols), and of course the leader of Warrington Council, have welcomed the Government's decision to bring this motion forward.

Yvonne Fovargue: I recognise that there is debate about this, but I have to say that the whole of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority supports it, plus Transport for Greater Manchester. Despite Warrington Council being held up—I appreciate there are different views—the whole of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority does support the Golborne link.

Andrew Stephenson: I think we would all agree that we have to get high-speed rail right. Without the Golborne link, this is still a £13 billion to £19 billion scheme;

including the Golborne link, it a £15 billion to £22 billion scheme. We have to get it right: we have to ensure that we are delivering the maximum reductions in journey times to Scotland, that we have the least environmental damage possible and that we are building this infrastructure—the infrastructure that the House has just supported on Second Reading—in the right way. That is why I believe we are right to bring forward the motion to remove consideration of the Golborne link from the Bill while we look at alternatives.

I would like to tidy up some misunderstanding, as this has been mentioned by a couple of hon. Members, about the decision to remove the Golborne link on Monday 6 June—a day when there was also a confidence vote in this House. I think anybody who is aware of parliamentary procedure—I know all the Opposition Members here are very well aware of parliamentary procedure—will know that for me to table a written ministerial statement on the Monday, I had to inform the House I was doing so the week before. I notified the House authorities and also tabled the title of my written ministerial statement, which was well before any confidence vote was anticipated.

The hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) said that his only other explanation for what this could possibly be about was cuts. With the £96 billion of rail investment in the midlands and the north in the integrated rail plan, this is the biggest ever Government investment in our railways, and it cannot be described—seriously, it cannot—as a cut. I look forward to continuing to work with the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) to reduce journey times to Scotland.

I think we all have an interest in getting this infrastructure right, and I therefore ask the hon. Member for Makerfield not to push her amendments to a vote.

Question put and agreed to.

HIGH SPEED RAIL (CREWE - MANCHESTER) BILL: INSTRUCTION

Ordered,

That it be an instruction to the Select Committee to which the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill is committed to deal with the Bill as follows—

- (1) The Committee shall—
 - (a) make an appropriate assessment, in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (“the 2017 Regulations”), of the implications for a site within paragraph (2) of the provisions made in relation to the site by the Bill in view of the site’s conservation objectives, and
 - (b) make a recommendation to the House in relation to whether those provisions adversely affect the integrity of the site.
- (2) The following sites are within this paragraph—
 - (a) the Rochdale Canal special area of conservation, and
 - (b) a site to which paragraph (3) applies that the Committee determines, in accordance with the 2017 Regulations, is likely to be significantly affected by a provision of the Bill.
- (3) This paragraph applies to a European site (within the meaning of the 2017 Regulations) in relation to which—
 - (a) an amendment has been proposed by the member in charge of the Bill which, if the Bill were a private bill, could not be made except upon petition for additional provision, or

- (b) the Committee has been provided with additional information by the promoters after the date of this instruction.

(4) For the purposes of making an assessment under paragraph (1) or a determination under paragraph (2)(b), the Committee may require the promoters to provide the Committee with such information as the Committee may reasonably require.

(5) For the purposes of making an assessment under paragraph (1), the Committee—

- (a) must consult the relevant nature conservation body and have regard to any representations made by the body within such reasonable time as the Committee specifies;
- (b) is not required to consult the general public.

(6) In paragraph (5)(a), the “relevant nature conservation body” means—

- (a) in relation to a site in England, Natural England, and
- (b) in relation to a site in Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage.

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—(*Andrew Stephenson.*)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We now come to motion 6. Do I understand that the hon. Lady does not wish to move amendment (a) or (b)?

Yvonne Fovargue indicated assent.

HIGH SPEED RAIL (CREWE - MANCHESTER) BILL: INSTRUCTION (NO. 2)

Ordered,

That it be an instruction to the Select Committee to which the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill is committed to deal with the Bill as follows:

(1) The Committee shall, before concluding its proceedings, amend the Bill by—

- (a) leaving out provision relating to the railway between Hoo Green in Cheshire and a junction with the West Coast Main Line at Bamfurlong, south of Wigan, except for a spur from Hoo Green to the Parish of High Legh in Cheshire, and
- (b) making such amendments to the Bill as it thinks fit in consequence of the amendments made by virtue of sub-paragraph (a).

(2) The Committee shall not hear any petition to the extent that it relates to whether or not there should be a railway between Hoo Green in Cheshire and a junction with the West Coast Main Line at Bamfurlong, south of Wigan.

(3) The Committee shall treat the principle of the Bill, as determined by the House on the Bill’s Second Reading, as comprising the matters mentioned in paragraph 4; and those matters shall accordingly not be at issue during proceedings of the Committee.

(4) The matters referred to in paragraph (3) are—

- (a) the provision of a high speed railway between a junction with Phase 2a of High Speed 2 south of Crewe in Cheshire and Manchester Piccadilly Station,
- (b) in relation to the railway set out on the plans deposited in January 2022 in connection with the Bill in the office of the Clerk of the Parliaments and the Private Bill Office of the House of Commons, its broad route alignment, and
- (c) the fact that there are to be no new stations (other than Manchester Piccadilly and Manchester Airport) on, or spurs (other than the spur from Hoo Green to the Parish of High Legh) from, the railway mentioned in sub-paragraph (b).

(5) The Committee shall have power to consider any amendments proposed by the member in charge of the Bill which, if the Bill were a private bill, could not be made except upon petition for additional provision.

(6) Paragraph (5) applies only so far as the amendments proposed by the member in charge of the Bill fall within the principle of the Bill as provided for by paragraphs (3) and (4) above.

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—
(*Andrew Stephenson.*)

HIGH SPEED RAIL (CREWE - MANCHESTER) BILL: CARRY-OVER

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply in respect of the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill:

Suspension at end of current Session

(1) Further proceedings on the Bill shall be suspended from the day on which this Session of Parliament ends (“the current Session”) until the next Session of Parliament (“Session 2023–24”).

(2) If a Bill is presented in Session 2023–24 in the same terms as those in which the Bill stood when proceedings on it were suspended in the current Session—

- (a) the Bill so presented shall be ordered to be printed and shall be deemed to have been read the first and second time;
- (b) the Standing Orders and practice of the House applicable to the Bill, so far as complied with or dispensed with in the current Session or in the previous Session of Parliament (“Session 2021–22”), shall be deemed to have been complied with or (as the case may be) dispensed with in Session 2023–24;
- (c) any resolution relating to the Habitats Regulations that is passed by the House in the current Session in relation to the Bill shall be deemed to have been passed by the House in Session 2023–24;
- (d) the Bill shall be dealt with in accordance with—
 - (i) paragraph (3), if proceedings in Select Committee were not completed when proceedings on the Bill were suspended,
 - (ii) paragraph (4), if proceedings in Public Bill Committee were begun but not completed when proceedings on the Bill were suspended,
 - (iii) paragraph (5), if the Bill was waiting to be considered when proceedings on it were suspended,
 - (iv) paragraph (6), if the Bill was waiting for third reading when proceedings on it were suspended, or
 - (v) paragraph (7), if the Bill has been read the third reading time and sent to the House of Lords.
- (3) If this paragraph applies—
 - (a) the Bill shall stand committed to a Select Committee of such Members as were members of the Committee when proceedings on the Bill were suspended in the current Session;
 - (b) any instruction of the House to the Committee in the current Session shall be an instruction to the Committee on the Bill in Session 2023–24;
 - (c) all petitions submitted in the current Session which stand referred to the Committee and which have not been withdrawn, and any petition submitted between the day on which the current Session ends and the day on which proceedings on the Bill are resumed in Session 2023–24 in accordance with this Order, shall stand referred to the Committee in Session 2023–24;
 - (d) any minutes of evidence taken and any papers laid before the Committee in the current Session shall stand referred to the Committee in Session 2023–24;
 - (e) only those petitions mentioned in sub-paragraph (c), and any petition which may be submitted to the Private Bill Office and in which the petitioners complain of any amendment proposed by the member in charge of the Bill which, if the Bill were a private bill, could

not be made except upon petition for additional provision or of any matter which has arisen during the progress of the Bill before the Committee in Session 2023–24, shall stand referred to the Committee;

- (f) any petitioners whose petitions stand referred to the Committee in Session 2023–24 shall, subject to the rules and orders of the House, be entitled to be heard upon their petition by themselves, their counsel, representatives or parliamentary agents provided that the petition is prepared and signed in conformity with the rules and orders of the House; and the Member in charge of the Bill shall be entitled to be heard through counsel or agents in favour of the Bill against any such petition;
- (g) the Committee shall require any hearing in relation to a petition mentioned in sub-paragraph (f) above to take place in person, unless exceptional circumstances apply;
- (h) in applying the rules of the House in relation to parliamentary agents, any reference to a petitioner in person shall be treated as including a reference to a duly authorised member or officer of an organisation, group or body;
- (i) the Committee shall have power to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from day to day minutes of evidence taken before it;
- (j) the Committee shall have power to make special reports from time to time;
- (k) three shall be the quorum of the Committee.
- (4) If this paragraph applies, the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and to have been re-committed to a Public Bill Committee.
- (5) If this paragraph applies—
 - (a) the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and from the Public Bill Committee, and
 - (b) the Bill shall be set down as an order of the day for consideration.
- (6) If this paragraph applies—
 - (a) the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and from the Public Bill Committee and to have been considered, and
 - (b) the Bill shall be set down as an order of the day for third reading.
- (7) If this paragraph applies, the Bill shall be deemed to have passed through all its stages in this House.

Suspension at end of this Parliament

(8) If proceedings on the Bill are resumed in accordance with paragraph 2 but are not completed before the end of Session 2023–24, further proceedings on the Bill shall be suspended from the day on which that Session ends until the first Session of the next Parliament (“Session 2024–25”).

(9) If a Bill is presented in Session 2024–25 in the same terms as those in which the Bill stood when proceedings on it were suspended in Session 2023–24—

- (a) the Bill so presented shall be ordered to be printed and shall be deemed to have been read the first and second time;
- (b) the Standing Orders and practice of the House applicable to the Bill, so far as complied with or dispensed with in Session 2023–24 or in the current session or in Session 2021–22, shall be deemed to have been complied with or (as the case may be) dispensed with in Session 2024–25;
- (c) any resolution relating to the Habitats Regulations that is passed by the House in Session 2023–24 or in the current session in relation to the Bill shall be deemed to have been passed by the House in Session 2024–25;
- (d) the Bill shall be dealt with in accordance with—

- (i) paragraph (10), if proceedings in Select Committee were not completed when proceedings on the Bill were suspended,
- (ii) paragraph (11), if proceedings in Public Bill Committee were begun but not completed when proceedings on the Bill were suspended,
- (iii) paragraph (12), if the Bill was waiting to be considered when proceedings on it were suspended,
- (iv) paragraph (13), if the Bill was waiting for third when proceedings on it were suspended, or
- (v) paragraph (14), if the Bill has been read the third time and sent to the House of Lords.
- (10) If this paragraph applies—
- (a) the Bill shall stand committed to a Select Committee of such Members as were members of the Committee when proceedings on the Bill were suspended in Session 2023–24;
- (b) any instruction of the House to the Committee in the current Session or in Session 2023–24 shall be an instruction to the Committee on the Bill in Session 2024–25;
- (c) all petitions submitted in the current Session or in Session 2023–24 which stand referred to the Committee and which have not been withdrawn, and any petition submitted between the day on which the Session 2023–24 ends and the day on which proceedings on the Bill are resumed in Session 2024–25 in accordance with this Order, shall stand referred to the Committee in Session 2024–25;
- (d) any minutes of evidence taken and any papers laid before the Committee in Session 2023–24 or in the current session shall stand referred to the Committee in Session 2024–25;
- (e) only those petitions mentioned in sub-paragraph (c), and any petition which may be submitted to the Private Bill Office and in which the petitioners complain of any amendment proposed by the member in charge of the Bill which, if the Bill were a private bill, could not be made except upon petition for additional provision or of any matter which has arisen during the progress of the Bill before the Committee in Session 2024–25, shall stand referred to the Committee;
- (f) any petitioners whose petitions stand referred to the Committee in Session 2024–25 shall, subject to the rules and orders of the House, be entitled to be heard upon their petition by themselves, their counsel, representatives or parliamentary agents provided that the petition is prepared and signed in conformity with the rules and orders of the House; and the Member in charge of the Bill shall be entitled to be heard through counsel or agents in favour of the Bill against any such petition;
- (g) the Committee shall require any hearing in relation to a petition mentioned in sub-paragraph (f) above to take place in person, unless exceptional circumstances apply;
- (h) in applying the rules of the House in relation to parliamentary agents, any reference to a petitioner in person shall be treated as including a reference to a duly authorised member or officer of an organisation, group or body;
- (i) the Committee shall have power to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from day to day minutes of evidence taken before it;
- (j) the Committee shall have power to make special reports from time to time;
- (k) three shall be the quorum of the Committee.

(11) If this paragraph applies, the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and to have been re-committed to a Public Bill Committee.

- (12) If this paragraph applies—
- (a) the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and from the Public Bill Committee, and
- (b) the Bill shall be set down as an order of the day for consideration.
- (13) If this paragraph applies—
- (a) the Bill shall be deemed to have been reported from the Select Committee and from the Public Bill Committee and to have been considered, and
- (b) the Bill shall be set down as an order of the day for third reading.
- (14) If this paragraph applies, the Bill shall be deemed to have passed through all its stages in this House.

Other

(15) In paragraphs (1) and (8) above, references to further proceedings do not include proceedings under Standing Order 224A(8) (deposit of supplementary environmental information).

(16) In paragraphs (3) and (10) above, references to the submission of a petition are to its submission electronically, by post or in person.

(17) In paragraphs (2) and (9) above, references to the Habitats Regulations are to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—
(*Andrew Stephenson.*)

POSITIONS FOR WHICH ADDITIONAL SALARIES ARE PAYABLE FOR THE PURPOSES OF SECTION 4A(2) OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS ACT 2009

Ordered,

That the Order of the House of 19 March 2013 (Positions for which additional salaries are payable for the purposes of section 4A(2) of the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009) be amended, in paragraph (1)(a), by inserting, in the appropriate place, “the Select Committee on the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill”.—(*Andrew Stephenson.*)

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ELECTRICITY

That the draft Warm Home Discount (England and Wales) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 12 May, be approved.—(*Amanda Solloway.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

That the draft National Health Service (Integrated Care Boards: Exceptions to Core Responsibility) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 11 May, be approved.—(*Amanda Solloway.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

HEALTH AND PERSONAL SOCIAL SERVICES

That the Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2022 (SI, 2022, No. 554), a copy of which was laid before this House on 19 May, be approved.—(*Amanda Solloway.*)

The Deputy Speaker’s opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 22 June (Standing Order No. 41A).

Illegal Off-road Biking: Islwyn

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Amanda Solloway.*)

10.35 pm

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): Many people will have been enjoying the recent warm spell. The summer should be a time when people can appreciate their garden, walk their dog and enjoy the countryside. Sadly, for many of my constituents, that has proven impossible.

Many people have had their peace ruined by motorbikes or run for cover as these bikes tear up the mountainside, bringing misery in the summer months. Anyone who has been near these vehicles will recognise their deafening hum, intruding on people's right to enjoy peace in their own homes and scaring animals, including horses, dogs and other wildlife.

I know that the issue is not unique to my constituency. It is not even a rural or an urban issue. Anyone with a patch of countryside in their constituency will be plagued by these bikes. The matter has been raised in the past year by the hon. Members for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis), for Darlington (Peter Gibson) and for Redcar (Jacob Young) and my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher). My hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) recently raised a Westminster Hall debate about the issue, and a ten-minute rule Bill stood in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins).

There is clearly a wide range of support for getting to grips with the problem. In Islwyn, it is particularly acute. For those who do not know, Islwyn comprises a series of small towns and villages scattered along the mountains and valleys of west Gwent. It is lucky to have a beautiful natural habitat including areas such as Cwmcarn forest drive, Gwyddon forestry, Twmbarlwm, and Mynydd Machen. It is that nature and mountainous terrain that attracts off-road bikers, whose vehicles are tearing up our beautiful landscape. The bikes rip up footpaths and undo the conservation work done by so many excellent volunteers in the area.

Last year, I presented a petition to the House from the residents of Abercarn that received more than 100 signatures. Signatories told me of the true destruction caused by scramblers and quads. The petition said:

"The Gwyddon Forestry in Abercarn...has, until recent years, been a safe haven for wildlife to flourish and for cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders to enjoy the rights of way and footpaths afforded to them",

but the use of

"off-road vehicles has caused and continue to cause irreparable damage to the environment"

and is

"destroying the natural habitats of wildlife".

It continued:

"Residents have been threatened when confronting these illegal vehicle users and have concerns for their own safety when reporting these issues to the police."

Furthermore,

"the off-road vehicles are driven...recklessly by uninsured and unlicensed individuals."

It is therefore inevitable that accidents will take place.

With these reckless, uninsured and unlicensed individuals comes antisocial behaviour. They know that they are not allowed to be riding on public land, or sometimes private land, without permission, but they continue. Residents are being left intimidated by some off-road bikers who become incredibly aggressive when challenged. One constituent told me of an incident when she was simply enjoying a walk on Mynydd Machen. She said:

"It was gorgeous, and the views were stunning. This was spoilt by the hordes of off-road unregistered motorbikes, which hurled past me at great speed. Some shouted obscenities when I failed to move out of the way quickly enough for them to continue at their breakneck speed. On my return...on this walk yesterday afternoon, I was assaulted and robbed by a chap on an illegal off-road motorbike...I feel these hordes of off-road motorbikes are becoming far too brazen and aggressive when riding the mountains above our communities. I also feel they are aware Gwent Police have limited resources to curtail their illegal off-road activities and are under the misguided illusion they have free rein to cause havoc on our mountains."

That is just one example of the havoc caused by those who think they are above the law. I have so many more in my constituency postbag that I could fill a whole debate just reading out the terrible experiences of my constituents.

This is completely unacceptable. Residents should not be afraid to do things as simple as walking their dog or enjoying the stunning scenery that our valleys have to offer. When incidents are reported through the 101 service, constituents are often left frustrated by the waiting times. The delay stops accurate reporting and enforcement of these and other incidents of antisocial behaviour. I have heard accounts of members of the public being left waiting for 30 minutes, as well as calls being dropped altogether. When calls are answered it is often too late for police to attend. I believe we need to improve the resources attributed to the 101 number, and as a matter of urgency the Government should look into this issue and ensure that the phone is answered on time and in a speedy manner. It is crucial that we make such changes so that my constituents, and members of the public from across the country, can enjoy the amazing landscapes that Islwyn has to offer without fear or intimidation.

There are, of course, people who enjoy off-road biking responsibly. They go to designated tracks or use private land with permission. Unfortunately, those who do not respect the law ruin the reputation of the sport for everyone. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith), who has done so much on this issue, including bringing stakeholders together. However, the legislation is clear: this behaviour is illegal. The difficulty comes when police try enforcing the laws and preventing repeat offences.

Gwent police have worked incredibly hard to tackle this issue, and I pay tribute to them for their work on Operation Harley, in which they have seized more than 135 illegally driven off-road vehicles. However, several issues are making enforcement difficult, and changes to the law are needed to tackle this issue. There are three areas in which I believe we can make progress in ending the scourge of illegal off-road bikes. First, it is often not safe or indeed feasible for the police to chase culprits, especially in the mountainous landscapes of my constituency. Often, those bikes are extremely fast, and police cars cannot catch them. The riders have helmets on, which makes them difficult to identify, and they currently do not even need a registration plate. We need

to make it more difficult to own such vehicles, and we need to make sure they are registered so that they are identifiable. Someone who is not doing anything wrong has nothing to fear in registering their vehicle. Every sale of an off-road bike should be registered, and when ownership is transferred that should be registered too, or the previous owner will be held accountable for its illegal use.

The Government should give the police powers under section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 to punish those who drive vans transporting bikes to the mountains. We should also increase the minimum cost of recovering those vehicles after they have been seized. The current fine of £160 is far too low, and it is not enough of a deterrent to prevent future law breaking.

There are those who always say there is a simple solution to this problem. Why not provide a place for off-road bikers to enjoy their pastime freely, and create a circuit for them to go to? However, illegal off roaders have little or no interest in such schemes, and would much prefer to go off on their own, tearing up our countryside.

Considering the interest in this issue right across the House, I hope the Minister will listen to my points tonight, and agree to meet me and other interested MPs to hear how much of an impact this issue is having on our communities. This is a cross-party issue, and I hope we can work with the Government to bring an end to the matter. Illegal off-road biking may not draw massive amounts of attention in the press, but for those affected, it has an enormous impact on their day-to-day lives, from the noise to the intimidation. People should be free to enjoy their communities without fear of noise or intimidation. It is time to drive these illegal bikers off the road once and for all.

10.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Rachel Maclean): I start by expressing my thanks to the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) for securing this important debate. He has raised specific concerns about illegal off-road biking and the harm it causes communities. Any form of antisocial, dangerous or inconsiderate behaviour involving vehicles, including misused off-road bikes, is a serious issue.

I fully agree with the hon. Gentleman and his constituents that the misuse of off-road bikes and the resulting dangerous and antisocial behaviour causes a huge amount of concern and distress. In fact, I also answered for the Government during a Westminster Hall debate on this topic just a few weeks ago. I said then, and I repeat it now, that the Government are not prepared to accept a situation in which law-abiding citizens are adversely affected by the behaviour of others, whether it is taking place in the beautiful Gwent countryside, as he sets out, or even in Worcestershire or anywhere else. We are all aware from talking to our constituents just how harmful and damaging any form of antisocial behaviour can be. At its worst, it can have a detrimental effect on the natural environment and it can ruin people's enjoyment of public spaces and their communities. I pay tribute to Gwent police for all the work that it has done very effectively. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has played his part in that, and I thank him for that.

The Government are focusing on this issue through our beating crime plan and also through our police recruitment programme, and we are using those levers to drive action to make our cities, towns and villages safer and more peaceful places to live, work and socialise. The police, local authorities and other local agencies have a range of flexible tools and powers under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. The hon. Gentleman has highlighted some of the issues he sees in his constituency, and he is right to say that this is an acutely local issue. That is why we believe local areas are best placed to decide how best to deploy those powers, depending on the specific circumstances. They are best placed to understand what is driving the behaviour in question and the impact it is having, and then to determine the most appropriate response.

Importantly, the 2014 Act contains specific measures designed to give victims and communities a say in how complaints of antisocial behaviour are dealt with. I am referring to the community trigger, which gives victims of persistent antisocial behaviour the ability to demand a formal case review. In addition to antisocial behaviour powers, the police have the power under section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 to seize vehicles, including misused off-road bikes being used in an antisocial manner. This can be as a result of someone using a vehicle in a careless and inconsiderate manner or in a manner causing alarm, distress or annoyance to members of the public. I must remind the hon. Gentleman and anyone listening that enforcement of road traffic law and the deployment of resources is the responsibility of individual chief officers and chief constables, taking into account the specific local problems and demands.

The hon. Gentleman has called for the introduction of a mandatory registration scheme. We have reviewed that, but we do not believe at the present time that the introduction of such a scheme for off-road bikes would be the most effective way to tackle dangerous and antisocial use. It would place a burden and cost on law-abiding citizens who would be most impacted by the requirements. We believe that the police have adequate enforcement powers to deal with the vehicles being used. In response to his comments and his ask of me, I would be happy to meet him and any other members of this House or any other local parties who would be interested. He highlighted a number of areas of policy and law that sit within other ministerial portfolios, most notably those of the Department for Transport, and possibly even the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if a farm vehicle is being referred to.

The hon. Gentleman referred to funding. He will know that we have devoted considerable resources and funding, during the course of our time in government, to ensure that all local areas have additional funding for their police forces. In Gwent, I am sure he will welcome the 143 officers who have been recruited as part of the police uplift programme, with a further 82 to be recruited next year.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate and for his contribution. It is clear that this subject is generating considerable interest in some areas, not least his own. He is doing exactly the right thing by raising this issue with his local police and crime commissioner and chief constable.

[Rachel Maclean]

The Government fully recognise the damage and distress caused by this type of antisocial behaviour, including the wilful and illegal misuse of off-road bikes. We should never accept a situation in which law-abiding people suffer as a result of others' reckless and selfish actions. The Government certainly will not. That is why

we will continue to support the police to enforce road traffic legislation. We will use every available measure to confront the scourge of antisocial behaviour.

Question put and agreed to.

10.50 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 20 June 2022

[MARK PRITCHARD *in the Chair*]

Farmed Animals: Cages

4.30 pm

Matt Vickers (Stockton South) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 593775, relating to the use of cages for farmed animals.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I am delighted to lead this debate on behalf of the 109,000 people who signed the petition and the organisation Compassion in World Farming, which organised it and is determined to see an end to the cage age.

In recent times, there have been huge changes in the way that animal cages are used, with bans on veal crates and on barren battery cages for laying hens, and a partial ban on sow stalls. However, 16 million animals across the UK are still confined to cages. Legislation now recognises animals as sentient beings, and the British public love our chickens and pigs; from Peppa Pig to Chicken Little, and Miss Piggy to Camilla the Chicken, we treasure our farmyard friends and their personalities. We are a nation of animal lovers and, for that reason, the UK rightly enjoys the highest animal welfare standards in the world.

We have introduced a raft of legislation to further protect our animals, extending custodial sentences and introducing fixed penalty notices for those who abuse animals. We have banned barbaric glue traps, created an offence of pet abduction for those sick and depraved individuals who would steal someone's cherished pet, and introduced the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill to tackle puppy smuggling, the export of live animals and livestock worrying. Ending the cage age is the logical next step.

I think that many people assume that the end of barren battery cage farming meant the end of the cage age, and that our chickens now enjoy the freedom they are naturally owed. However, that is simply not the case. Across the world, 60% of eggs are produced in industrial systems. Here in the UK, 35.5% of all eggs produced are from caged birds. Imagine the life of a chicken that has never felt the grass underfoot or the sun on her back.

In 2012, barren battery cages were banned and, in many cases, replaced with enriched cages. However, while enriched cages are a step up, they still do not offer the quality of life that the public would think our chickens enjoy. Some are little bigger than an A4 sheet of paper and restrict many of a hen's natural behaviours, including wing flapping, running, perching at a reasonable height above ground, dust bathing and foraging. There is a wealth of scientific evidence demonstrating that hen welfare is still compromised in enriched cages.

All of the UK's main, responsible supermarkets have either already stopped selling eggs from caged hens or committed to doing so by 2025. The Government must get behind that progressive development by banning the use of those cages to protect the hens that are not part

of supermarket supply chains, and by ensuring that the majority of British farmers are not undercut by farmers still using cages, whether they are in Britain or exporting to us. It is also important to note that, as well as being sold in shells, eggs are ingredients in products we buy. We must strive for a higher standard for all our chickens.

The petitioners also request a ban on the use of fixed farrowing crates for sows. It seems more than appropriate to look back at the last time that was proposed, when the late and great Sir David Amess brought forward a ten-minute rule Bill—the Pig Husbandry (Farrowing) Bill. A change to this area of the law would be an incredible tribute to an incredible man who constantly fought to further animal welfare standards in this country.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech; I, too, reflect on the fantastic advancement in animal welfare that Sir David Amess made during his time here. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, because 60% of UK sows farrow indoors in severe confinement caused by the crate, with no space to stand up or turn around, they are unable to perform natural social behaviours, and that we should join other countries, such as Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, in outlawing these crates?

Matt Vickers: I will come on to that issue, but I think there are better alternatives that will still support the safety of piglets.

Farrowing cages rightly seek to prevent the death of piglets by crushing. More than 50% of UK sows are placed in farrowing crates a few days before giving birth. They are kept there during farrowing and until the piglets are weaned at three to four weeks of age. That means that every year in the UK, over 200,000 sows are confined in those systems for some nine to 10 weeks of the year—in some cases longer—despite the fact that scientific evidence has shown that sow welfare is severely compromised in farrowing crates. The crates result in sows being forced to give birth in a tiny space and then to nurse their young through bars. The space in the crate is so restricted that sows cannot even turn around: all they can do is stand up or lie down until their piglets are weaned, usually at around four weeks of age. Confined in those crates, sows bite and chew the bars and scrape at the floor in frustration. Many endure painful wounds and sores on their legs, feet and shoulders caused by slipping or lying on the hard slatted floors.

Some 40% of the UK's sows are reared in outdoor free farrowing systems. Calculations based on figures from the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board show that total piglet mortalities—stillbirths and pre-weaning mortalities combined—have been lower in outdoor systems than indoor ones in 19 out of the past 20 years. A large-scale study by E. M. Baxter looked at the role of farrowing crates and found that designed free farrowing pens had the lowest pig mortality rate, at just 16.6%. That was followed by outdoor systems, at 17%, and farrowing crates, at 18.3%. Indoor group multi-suckling systems had the highest piglet mortality, at 23.7%. Farrowing crates clearly appear to be worse for piglet mortality than free farrowing pens.

Now is the time to work with the industry to find a way forward that protects both piglets and sows, supports our farmers during the transition, and ensures that

[*Matt Vickers*]

those farmers remain competitive. I know our great British farmers want the best for their animals—in fact, there is no one better qualified or driven than a farmer to look after our animals. Their expertise, care, and commitment to the welfare of animals is second to none. Anything done in this space must be done with farmers, not to farmers. The Government must use their new-found Brexit freedom to support our farmers in transitioning from the cage age, ensuring that they are not undercut by those who continue to use cages.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): When we banned veal crates in the United Kingdom, we thought we had solved the problem. In fact, all we did was deny British farmers an advantage, because those veal crates were used on the continent and we then imported the product. The difference now is that post Brexit, we can prevent those imports, so does my hon. Friend agree that there is now no excuse for not banning crates?

Matt Vickers: That is an incredibly valuable point, and one that I am sure the Minister will respond to. We can now determine the future of those crates ourselves, which I think is wonderful.

It is up to the Government to work with the sector to ensure that an informed and achievable transition plan is put in place, and to support farmers financially through the subsidy scheme to meet transition and capital costs. Both the Minister and the Prime Minister have outlined an ambition to ban the use of farrowing crates for sows. In May 2021, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs published an action plan for animal welfare that committed to examine the use of crates for pigs and cages for laying hens, and in March 2022, a response to a written parliamentary question confirmed that the Government plan to consult on the issue. I hope the Minister can confirm when that consultation will begin.

I am proud of the steps that the Government have already taken to ensure that our animal welfare standards are the best in the world, and I am delighted that great British farmers strive to reach—and, in fact, maintain—very high standards for animal husbandry. I hope this debate can help to progress that cause and result in happy chickens, happy pigs and happy farmers.

4.39 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Pritchard. I thank the hon. Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) for his comprehensive introduction.

In advance of the debate, I was contacted by a number of constituents who expressed their disappointment that there was nothing in the Queen's Speech about the sort of animal welfare reforms that will be the main part of our discussion today. They told me that, as we have heard, DEFRA's action plan for animal welfare, published over a year ago, said that the Government are committed to issuing a consultation. We have heard that that will be on its way shortly, but the action plan also stated that

“we will introduce other reforms to improve farm welfare, including examining the use of cages for laying hens and farrowing crates for pigs.”

A year on, we are still waiting for that action.

Every year that passes without action means that millions more animals are kept in unnatural and often distressing conditions that we ought to be shamed into doing something about. I hope we will hear today about substantial progress, because some of the conditions are awful. I have heard about cages that are so small that pregnant mothers are unable to turn around and move for four or five weeks once a litter is born. Even DEFRA recognises that these conditions can restrict a sow's normal behaviour, including nesting behaviour.

We know that the European Commission plans to ban cages for all farmed animals, hopefully by 2027. Significantly for us, it will also look to prohibit the import of food from caged systems. We no longer have to automatically follow what the EU is doing, but we ought to be using our new-found freedoms to go further and faster than the EU so that we can genuinely say that we are the world leader in animal welfare. Let us do that rather than go the other way.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): Further to that point about our new-found freedom, many of my constituents voted to leave the European Union in order to enhance our animal welfare standards. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that when we introduce new animal welfare legislation, we must ensure that we do not repeat the mistake, which my right hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) mentioned, of looking only at the domestic position and outsourcing poor practice to other countries? If we introduce a ban, we must ensure that we do not enable poor practice via imports.

Justin Madders: The hon. Member makes an important point. That should be said not just for animal welfare standards but for environmental standards and employment protections, all of which we used to have on a clear level from the EU.

Three out of four UK adults back a ban on the use of cages for breeding game birds, and a large coalition of animal welfare charities also backs a ban on cages. As I mentioned, the EU is the largest export market for UK farmers, so I hope we all agree that there is an economic case here as well as a moral one. If we are truly to call ourselves a progressive nation of animal lovers, we must phase out this outdated and cruel practice. The lack of action over the last year paints a very different picture from the commitment to keeping these reforms on the go.

The use of cages for breeding game birds should be also banned. Wider action against cages in farming should include the breeding of game birds to end cruelty and provide consistency across species. Figures from the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust show that more than 60 million non-native pheasants and partridges are released every year in the UK to be shot for sport. Many of these birds are bred in the UK using factory-style farming and raised laying cages.

Breeding birds are often kept in small wire cages for much of their breeding lives. As we have heard, those cages are incredibly small. They provide approximately 0.0011% of the space that a pheasant would typically enjoy in the wild, and 0.00004% of the space that a partridge would enjoy. We would not tolerate that for a dog or a cat, so why should we tolerate it for game birds?

Given the semi-wild nature of pheasants and partridges, the cramped conditions of the cages cause stress and injury, including painful open foot sores, exposure to extreme temperatures and injury caused by escape attempts. Aggression is also a common sign of stress in these birds, which can result in self-injury or injury to other birds. Given the conditions they are kept in, that is hardly surprising. It is also hardly surprising that most people, when told about these conditions, agree that as a nation of animal lovers we should not allow those kinds of things to happen.

I hope that we get agreement and acceptance from the Minister that this kind of treatment of any animal should be consigned to history, and that there is a clear road map and timetable for that to happen as soon as possible.

4.45 pm

Sir Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I am quite concerned about what is going on here today. I do not think anybody wants to defend sow stalls or enriched cages, but we need considerably more detail and honesty. The 16 million “animals” that my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) referred to are all chickens—well, there are 200,000 pigs—so realistically, this is not exactly about “animals”; the petitioners could have put “birds”.

We saw one of the most infuriating attacks on poultry during the avian influenza outbreak: all free-range chickens were put inside, and no free-range eggs were available in our shops. There was not one campaign about that appalling treatment of poultry. It is entirely understandable why the Government insisted on locking up our chickens, but there was a real welfare issue and we heard not a squeak.

The same applies to all the other things we are dealing with here. My hon. Friend made a lovely speech, but 180,000 extra piglets will die if those crates are not used. That may be acceptable, but it is part of the story. The real problem is that unless the farmer can make a decent living—unless agriculture is profitable—he cannot undergo those kinds of losses, yet that is what we want.

We need to be much more honest about this issue. When we go to Tesco and see bacon from Brookfield Farm, it is coming from Denmark; it is not British-produced. When we get a letter about game birds, we should be aware that most of the game birds released in this country are bred in France. Because of the avian influenza over there, there has been a massive shortage of eggs and chicks. That is because the French reacted differently.

A lot of this animal welfare debate needs to be focused on truth and accuracy, and on the points my hon. Friends made earlier about what we import. We cannot expect to have better animal welfare if we do not honestly and accurately tell the truth about it to each other.

Sir Roger Gale: I have listened with wry amusement to my hon. Friend, who I think I am right in saying is a Brexiteer. One of the advantages—some might argue the only advantage—of leaving the European Union was that we were going to be able to exercise control over what came into the United Kingdom. I argued vociferously for a long time that we should not disadvantage our own farming community by putting up costs in a way that prevented them from making a living in competition with, for example, Denmark on pigs. Now that we have

left the European Union, we have the power to say that we will not allow into the United Kingdom a product that has been produced under circumstances that we would not permit here. That is what we are asking for. I hope that my hon. Friend understands that.

Sir Bill Wiggin: How could I not understand? My right hon. Friend was crystal clear. However, I am not sure it is quite as straightforward as we would like. He will be aware that people in dinghies are coming into his constituency. We have not quite got the hang of border control yet, but I hope that we will in due course.

In respect of this debate, there are wider problems. The biggest problem for pig farmers is the foot and mouth outbreak we suffered in 2001. The best thing to do with pigs is feed them waste food. Until we can get back to doing that, it will always be difficult for our pig farmers to make a margin, but I agree with my right hon. Friend that it would be wonderful if we could stop other people doing horrible things to animals. Unfortunately, he also supports the ban on foxhunting, which led to the complete eradication of my chickens. There are balances to be had in the countryside, and we need honesty in this debate.

The more accurate we can be, the better. For example, 55% of UK egg production is free range. It is only 9.1% in Spain and 4.9% in Italy, so we are actually doing an extremely good job in this country. We should be supporting our farmers rather than criticising them, particularly for things that are going on abroad.

4.50 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I thank the hon. Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) for opening today’s debate, and the near 110,000 members of the public who took the time to sign e-petition 593775. We should acknowledge that it is not the first petition on this issue, and one containing a similar call to action received over 100,000 signatures back in 2019.

I have said many times before that animal welfare is an issue on which I always receive a high number of emails from my constituents, and this debate has been no exception. One hundred or so of my constituents have signed the petition, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to represent them here this afternoon. I thank the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Compassion in World Farming for their informative, interesting and useful briefings.

Before I get into the main content of my speech, I want to take a moment to recognise the ten-minute rule Bill brought forward by the late Sir David Amess last spring: the Pig Husbandry (Farrowing) Bill, which would have prohibited the use of farrowing crates by 2027. Animal welfare was one of Sir David’s most passionately pursued causes, and I am sure we all agree that if the Government agree to changes in caged animal law, his contribution to so many debates and campaigns will have been a significant driving force.

The petition text highlights some of the key issues well, but there is an important specific point: caged animals have a low quality of life. They are cooped up, their movement is restricted, and they are left unable to exhibit their natural behaviours. It is unnecessarily distressing for the animals and causes suffering when it

[Margaret Ferrier]

need not. The European Commission intends to ban farm animals from being caged by 2027, and is considering imposing restrictions on imports from cage systems. In fact, several European countries have already proactively banned cage systems. The petition is correct in its statement that, by not doing the same, the UK will fall behind the EU in animal welfare standards, creating further issues for future trade.

Battery cages for laying hens were outlawed across the EU, including in the UK, a decade ago. Unfortunately, along with most of Europe, we continue to allow enriched cages. Although they are better than battery cages, they are still too small for the birds inside them—the size of an A4 sheet of paper. The lack of space severely restricts the birds' natural movements, and they are not able to run, fly or even flap their wings. The restriction on physical exercise has real health impacts, leading to bone weakness or osteoporosis. The RSPCA puts the number of laying hens in enriched cages at around 14 million, or approximately 35% of the UK's total supply chain.

Luxembourg and Austria have already outlawed enriched cages, and Germany and Slovakia have committed to a ban in the near future. France announced five years ago that all shell eggs sold in supermarkets would be free range by this year. Further afield, Taiwan is beginning the process of phasing out cages. The removal of hen cages has huge support, with large national brands such as Nestlé and Nando's supporting calls for the Government to introduce legislation. Another petition on change.org is closing in on 100,000 signatures.

When we go into supermarkets and do our weekly shop, we should not have to keep an eye out for free-range eggs. It should not have to be something that businesses point to as a mark of their animal welfare morals; it should be the norm. Every egg should be free range and there should be no laying hens confined to cages in the UK. With the cost of living crisis currently hitting families hard, there should be no disparity in the cost of free-range and caged-hen eggs. Retailers have a responsibility to allow the public to make the ethical choices they would like to. The RSPCA's animal welfare index reported no evidence that income was related to the animal welfare considerations that people make when purchasing their food. It should not cost more to make the ethical choice.

We have to consider the impact on the farming industry too, bearing in mind the evidence that consumers are willing to support free range and higher animal welfare standards, even when there is sometimes an increase in cost. Retailers such as Aldi, Lidl, Marks & Spencer and Sainsbury's stock RSPCA-assured products, such as eggs and pork, showing the retail willingness to support the farming industry in that movement. Most importantly for farmers is the impact a potential EU ban would have on their ability to trade. It would be economically damaging and the work to mitigate that must start now.

I have said in previous animal welfare debates that the Government set out an ambitious agenda with their animal welfare action plan, and they have said consistently that they are committed to high standards of animal welfare in the UK. That is why it seems contradictory to overlook important areas of policy such as the use of cages. I recognise the past few years have seen improvements

to farm animal welfare in the UK. I also recognise the publication of the animal health and welfare programme, and the announcement of a forthcoming public consultation, and I hope the Minister can update us on the timings. The Scottish Government have also committed to a consultation this year on phasing out caged animals. It is an area in which the UK must continue to show its ambition and commitment. The public have made their view resoundingly clear for years.

4.57 pm

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard, and to follow excellent speeches from my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) and the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier). I thank all those who have taken the time to sign the petition.

I am here today to make the case for a managed transition away from the use of cages in farming. We have heard about the harm caused by the kind of intensive farming that deploy those methods. I am worried about enriched cages in which laying hens may have little more space than a A4 sheet of paper. As RSPCA research shows, such systems restrict natural behaviour such as wing flapping, running and dust bathing. Constraints on the ability to move around compromise welfare and can contribute to bone weakness and osteoporosis. With all UK supermarkets either having stopped selling eggs from caged hens or committed to do so, now is the time to set the timetable for an end to enriched cages.

I appreciate we have to take that forward in a viable and sustainable way for the farming sector. I hear the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South on getting the facts clear. At a time of inflation we must take care not to do anything to cause pressure on food prices. The Government have now started delivery of their new farm support system. When the Minister responded to the previous debate on this issue, she emphasised that improved animal health and welfare were an important goal for environmental land management. This debate demonstrates that we need an ELM scheme that is focused on higher welfare standards in the poultry sector. That is one of the ways we can smooth the way for the ban on cages that so many of our constituents want to see happen. Many major companies are backing the campaign, including Nestlé and Greggs. Over 75% of the restaurant sector have committed to going cage free in the eggs that they buy.

The fact that countries such as Switzerland and Germany have banned enriched cages shows that there are economically viable ways to do that. The Government promised to look at the issue in their 2021 action plan on animal welfare, so let us see the consultation published to take us closer to the day when we ban cages for laying hens.

We must also see the same urgency given to the replacement of farrowing crates, as called for by the late Sir David Amess in Westminster Hall in 2020. I accept that there are delicate factors to balance if we are to safeguard both the sow and her young, but there are commercially available free-farrowing systems that give the sow room to move while protecting her piglets.

How do we make such systems financially viable for our producers? The Government have stated their ambition to end the use of farrowing crates. They have done so

several times, with even the Prime Minister stating it. Again, I ask for a clear plan from the Government, working with farmers, to reach the goal that they have set themselves.

Sir Roger Gale: Does my right hon. Friend endorse entirely the view that that has to be done in a managed way, so that the impact is not catastrophic overnight? Does she agree that, in tandem with that, if we are to go down this road, we must ensure that we start to control the import of products produced in conditions that we would not allow in this country?

Theresa Villiers: Indeed. I have been clear that I do not believe that we should allow our own producers to be driven out of business by competition from lower-welfare imports. That should be a much bigger priority in our trade policy than it is at the moment. I urge the Minister to raise these matters with the International Trade Secretary.

In fact, I was about to come on to that point. Whether it is cages or crates, we have to ensure that the rules we impose domestically are reflected in our international trade rules. It is important to ensure that our farmers can compete on a level playing field and that they are not driven out of business by low-welfare competition from overseas.

The Government have a strong record on animal welfare. Our animal-welfare commitments are more wide-ranging than those in any winning manifesto of any party. We have introduced measures such as CCTV in slaughterhouses; we have banned third-party sales of puppies; we have increased the maximum sentence for animal cruelty; we are delivering compulsory microchipping for pet cats; we have introduced one of the toughest ivory bans in the world; and soon, I hope, we will become the first European country to ban the live export of animals for slaughter or fattening. Let us strengthen that record still further by listening to the petitioners today, who want to see an end of the cage age.

5.3 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I extend my thanks to the hon. Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) for the tone and content of how he opened the debate.

The decision as to whether we permit farm animals to be kept in cages is not a party political issue, and nor should it be. I am sure that the almost 110,000 signatories to the petition come from a whole cross-section of the population, with a whole range of different political affiliations and none, as is the case today in this Chamber. That should surprise none of us, since animal welfare clearly matters a great deal to the vast majority of the population and certainly to the vast majority of my constituents in North Ayrshire and Arran. Some 78% of people across the UK oppose factory-farming practices, such as breeding chickens to grow unnaturally fast and keeping large numbers of animals inside crowded facilities as a means of producing affordable food.

We should all instinctively recoil from putting a sentient being into a cage. To put animals in cages deprives them of expressing their natural behaviours and can only cause them suffering. Yet across the UK, as we have heard, millions of farmed animals are kept in cages, so it really is time to end the cage age once and for all.

If we look to our European neighbours, we see that banning the caging of farm animals is set to come into force, potentially by 2027, and they are also seeking to ban the import of food from caged systems, which is a critical point, as we have heard this afternoon. As the Brexit debate raged on, I recall that Minister after Minister came to the main Chamber and indeed to TV studios to proclaim confidently that leaving the EU would mean that the UK could forge ahead with improved animal welfare. Yet now, unless we get cracking, the UK is set to lag behind the EU, with the EU banning the import of food from caged systems, which will have further implications for our farming exports. Therefore, instead of falling behind, across the UK we should be working to secure a ban on farrowing crates for sows and individual calf pens.

In their programme for Government for 2021-22, the Scottish Government committed to starting consultation this year on proposals to

“phase out cages for gamebirds and laying hens, and farrowing crates for pigs.”

In its 2021 manifesto for the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish National party committed

“to shifting to entirely free range, woodland or barn chicken and egg production”,

as well as promising to

“modernise and update the Animal Welfare Act from 2006”

and to implementing new livestock legislation. I urge the UK Government to mirror those actions. We know that the action we want to see cannot happen overnight; we have already heard that. However, we need to get on with the transition that we all want to happen.

Scotland’s agriculture sector has some of the highest standards in the world and it is really important that those standards are not sacrificed for trade deals with countries with lower standards. This matters not only for animal welfare, important though it is, but for the quality of our food supply. For example, a wealth of scientific evidence demonstrates that hen welfare is compromised in cages. That is why all the UK’s main supermarkets have either stopped selling eggs from caged hens or have committed to doing so by 2025. In addition, companies such as Burger King and Tim Hortons have announced that they, with all their worldwide locations, will stop sourcing eggs and egg products from caged hens by 2025 in 92% of their markets, and by 2030 for the remaining 8%.

Businesses that survive and thrive do so because they give their customers what they want. What consumers want is more ethical and more humane treatment of animals, which means no caging and as little suffering as possible. If businesses can respond to consumer demand, then Government can do so too—indeed, they should do so.

However, vitally, even if we set the very highest standards for our own agriculture sector, we cannot allow, as many Members have already said, those standards to be undercut by imports from countries that have lower standards, including caging animals, which would cause a race to the bottom. For example, we know that barren battery cages, which were banned in the UK in 2012, are legal in Australia, as are sow stalls, which were banned in the UK in 1999. There is clearly no point banning a practice in the UK because it is cruel and inhumane yet allowing that cruelty to be outsourced,

[Patricia Gibson]

so that the product of this poor regard for animal welfare is still allowed to land on our supermarket shelves, whether it is eggs, meat or any other food produce.

The EU has taken a lead on banning cage systems; the UK Government must follow that lead. The SNP Scottish Government will work and seek to work collaboratively with the UK Government to ensure that animal welfare legislation within the remit of the UK system is of the highest possible standards. We in the SNP will continue to press the UK Government hard not to undercut domestic farmers in trade deals with distant lands that treat animals in a way that we know the people of the UK strongly disapprove of.

As the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) and others have pointed out, this is a very important matter, and it requires the UK Government to ask some hard, searching questions about trade deals. That is a critical point that the Minister will be keen to address. I know that she is listening, and I really hope she heeds these calls, for the sake of animal welfare, the quality of our food and our agricultural sector as a whole.

5.10 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I join Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers), who introduced the debate in a very measured way. I also thought he was very brave to mention Peppa Pig in his introduction. He set the scene very effectively for a debate on what is a large petition, with over 100,000 signatures. I congratulate Compassion in World Farming and others on securing such support. We know that the support is widespread across the country. I very much enjoyed addressing the rally by Compassion in World Farming outside Parliament last week. It demanded that the Government get on with ending the live export of animals. I will return to that issue.

We had a very similar debate on this issue just over two years ago in Westminster Hall. Members might reflect on whether much has changed in that time. I am sure the Minister would be keen to say that much has, but I am not sure that it has. I reflect on the very powerful contribution made by Sir David Amess that day. It was the most powerful contribution in that debate, I think. He made a plea to move things forward.

Members have noted that there have been improvements over the past few decades. We have seen the end of barren battery cages, veal cages for calves and sow stalls for pigs, but we still have a long way to go. Every year, we keep around 16 million farmed animals in cages. There are alternatives. I thought some of the points made by Government Members were very interesting. There is clearly not a settled position on the Government side on trade policy on this issue. There is absolutely no point making improvements here if we just export cruelty elsewhere. There is also no point introducing measures that our industry cannot cope with. That is why we must make changes in a sensible, measured way.

I thought the point made by the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers), was powerful. These are not easy

issues. There are easy slogans, but these are hard issues. Those who saw the article in *The Times* on Saturday will see that the current Secretary of State is perhaps at odds with other members of the Government on this. It is an ongoing discussion. There can be no solution to this problem unless we can work with others.

I will not repeat a lot of the statistics that have been mentioned about egg-laying hens. These points are probably the same ones that I and others made two years ago and which others have made today. It is interesting to see the supermarkets moving in response to consumer demand, but it is not just the retail sector that uses eggs, and not all supermarkets have come to the same conclusion.

When consumers are hard pressed, price does matter. There is no point denying that. There are extra costs, particularly at a time when we are suffering huge problems with avian flu, which has created difficulties for the sector. Earlier this afternoon, I was talking to people in the industry, who warned me that some egg producers are within weeks of having to make some big decisions. That is bad for them, but it is also bad for us, because later in the year there is a risk that we will suddenly not have a regular supply of eggs. These are complicated questions.

Tracey Crouch: Does the hon. Member agree that as the UK continues to be gripped by the cost of living crisis, it is really important that retailers—especially ones that pride themselves on offering less expensive food—embrace the drive to be cage-free, so that all consumers can benefit from better welfare standards?

Daniel Zeichner: Indeed. That goes to the heart of some of the difficult issues in the supply chains. It is also the case that the Groceries Code Adjudicator has seen more claims in recent times because of the pressure in the supply chain. We can all understand that. It goes back to some fairly basic questions about how we address rising energy prices, but that is a debate for another day. The knock-on effect through sectors like this is very real. I fear that it will be difficult for some in the supply chain. We have problems in the poultry sector, but we have also seen huge problems in the pig sector over the last year or two. The Minister and I have exchanged strong words about this many times at the Dispatch Box.

Leaving aside the issue of the cages, some of the ways in which we have had to cull healthy pigs are not great, nor are some of the conditions that pigs have had to be kept in, as they get too big for the space. There are problems throughout the sectors. We have heard about the problems with cages, and the distress that that can cause by stopping pigs engaging in their natural behaviours, such as nesting. I have been on pig farms and must say, when I see biting behaviour, it worries me, because they are clearly intelligent animals and, sometimes, they are stressed.

The cages can lead to higher stress levels, longer farrowing durations and higher stillbirth rates. Again, I understand the arguments from the industry about why it thinks it needs those things to prevent the deaths of piglets by accidental crushing. However, I hear what other Members have said, and when I look at the evidence, it seems that there are other ways of doing it in other places, and I think that we must move on to loose-housing systems.

In passing, I would mention the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and others about the fact that other countries are moving forward on these issues. The EU's 2027 target may be optimistic, but I think that there is sometimes a danger that Government Members that the world is standing still out there—it is not. The automatic assumption is that we will be in a better place—not necessarily. It would be sensible, I would say, to move at a similar pace, because then some of these problems could be resolved sensibly.

There are also, of course, concerns about calf pens. Although veal crates are banned, young calves can still be kept in solitary caged hutches for the first eight weeks of their lives, as soon as they have been taken away from the mother cow. The logic for that is said to be that young calves are highly susceptible to disease. I was on one of my local farms the other day and witnessed exactly that. However, again, it is pretty clear that cattle are social animals, and there is evidence that calves are more stressed and fearful when caged individually in that way so soon after birth. There is also research that shows that housing calves in pairs leads to a number of positive outcomes without compromising health or production, so there are things that can and should be done.

We have also heard that cages are not only used for animals farmed for food. The issue of the millions of pheasants and partridges that are mass-produced to be shot still raises serious issues and concerns for many of us. Our worry is that they live in so-called raised laying cages that can be left outside, exposed to the elements and to extremes of temperature, with the birds suffering from feather loss, scalping and injuries inflicted by their stressed cage mates.

The regulatory system for that seems not to be up to date. The current code of practice for the welfare of game birds reared for sporting purposes is, I am told, not legally binding, and was due to be reviewed a few years ago, but that did not take place. I am also told that the Minister has indicated, in response to parliamentary questions, that the Government are examining the use of cages for game birds, so I am sure that she will be able to confirm that. As an observation, there seems to be a lot of examining going on in the Department these days; we need action rather than examining. Will the Minister confirm that, as previously stated, DEFRA will be calling for evidence later this year as part of the investigation into the welfare of game birds?

The Opposition watch these developments with some interest. Two years ago, when we were scrutinising through the Agriculture Bill we tabled a number of amendments to increase the maximum stocking density for chickens reared in barns and to end the use of sow-farrowing crates. We did so again in the Committee that scrutinised the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill. Sadly, the Government chose not to support those amendments, but I am rather hoping that, over time, they will come round to our way of thinking. The Kept Animals Bill seems to be a little delayed, I think it is fair to say.

The Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food (Victoria Prentis) *indicated dissent.*

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): The Minister is shaking her head. In that case, I am sure that she can give us a good timetable. That will come as a relief to

many of us. It has been carried over; let us hope that we see it soon. As has been said by many others, we need action now to bring an end to the cage age.

It is also vital that we ensure that any domestic production of animal products, produced through higher welfare, cage-free standards, is not simply undercut and replaced by imports from countries that still use lower-welfare cage systems. Any conversation with farmers at the moment leads very quickly to their concerns about being undercut in trade deals. I think we may be discussing this issue again later in the week but, to our eyes, the Government's long-delayed national food strategy failed to include proper protections for imported food. Henry Dimbleby, the author of the Government inquiry that was set up a few years ago, said:

“Yet again the government has ducked the issue of how we don't just import food that destroys the environment and is cruel to animals—we can't create a good fair farming system, then export those harms abroad. I thought the government would address this but it didn't.”

Well, perhaps the Minister can do so today.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making excellent points, which are echoed by the many emails I have had from constituents on this issue. Does he agree that when food is produced much further away from where it is eaten, trying to interrogate animal welfare standards becomes almost impossible for consumers and shops?

Daniel Zeichner: The hon. Lady raises a very important question, and one of the challenges of the years and decades ahead will be to try to resolve these conundrums. The Opposition feel strongly that the more we can produce food closer to home, the better off we will be.

Although I appreciate that there are concerns about the impact that increasing animal welfare standards could have on food prices—particularly at the moment, when many households are struggling with sky-high inflation—the fact is that, as set out in Dimbleby's report, our food system is not working. It fails animals, it fails the environment and often it fails the consumer. In our view, the national food strategy has not addressed those issues. We want to see the Government work with the food sector to ensure that we can improve animal welfare without pushing up the cost for consumers. As I said two years ago, we need rock-solid commitments that ending the use of cages on our farms is a priority for the Government, and we need proper detail on how they plan to do that through a proper farming policy.

The Government have stated on numerous occasions their aspiration for the UK to become the global leader in farm animal welfare, and they really could embrace a cage-free future now. I ask the Minister to explain why this suffering should be allowed to continue, and why the Government have consistently kicked the can down the road when it comes to ending the cage age.

5.22 pm

The Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food (Victoria Prentis): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I, too, thank the Petitions Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers), and all the people who signed the petition and enabled us to debate this important subject.

[Victoria Prentis]

I agree with the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) that these are not easy issues to resolve. I think everybody in this room shares the goal of working to improve animal welfare, but we also live in a world where we are conscious that such improvements may increase the price of production of our food. I am committed, as are the Government, to working with producers and the food sector to raise standards across the board, and it is important that we set my remarks in that context.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South introduced the debate very well by emphasising that we need to work with, not against, the farming industry. I hope that my remarks will give him some reassurance on that. My hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Sir Bill Wiggin) called for honesty in the debate, which is critical. Many of us do not really know what we are eating or where it comes from, and nobody could have lobbied me more heavily than he did on behalf of chickens during the winter. There is nothing about his now sadly demised flock of chickens that I do not know, and I am sorry that they spent their final winter housed because of avian influenza.

I reassure my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) that improved animal health and welfare is integrated into all our farming schemes. There is very good news—I would be delighted to discuss it with her in greater detail—on the vet visits that are being rolled out next year, which will specifically target cattle, sheep and pigs. Those will be a good way to provide farmers and vets with a safe space to have a discussion that is not reported to me or the Department afterwards, and they will lead to some really sensible and long-term improvements in the health of the national flock.

I reassure the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) that animal welfare is right up the agenda when it comes to forging trade deals. I think everyone in this Chamber is of one mind that animal welfare is important and needs to be improved. Most of us are also aware that this is an extremely challenging time for Britain's farmers, with enormously increased input costs—of food, fuel and fertiliser—affecting almost all production systems to a greater or lesser extent.

The UK has a strong record of banning battery cages for laying hens, sow stalls for pigs and veal crates for calves. What have the Government been doing in recent years? The Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 was given Royal Assent in April, and provides legal recognition that animals are sentient, and that general Government decision making should continue to reflect that sentience. The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021 increased the maximum sentence for the worst animal cruelty offences from six months to five years in England and Wales. The Animals (Penalty Notices) Act 2022 will, I hope, support transparent enforcement and encourage good behaviours in husbandry generally.

I reassure everyone here that the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill remains a priority for the Government. As soon as the business managers can find us time in a busy parliamentary schedule, we expect a date on which we will debate the Bill on Report. That Bill will, alongside other measures, deal with the issue of excessively long journeys for slaughter and fattening. As I have discussed

with Members in the Chamber whose names I will not mention for fear of giving their age away, many of us have been committed to campaigning to end animal exports since we watched those pictures on “Blue Peter” as children.

I am pleased to say that moving away from cages is the direction of travel for the egg industry, so 60% of our hens are now kept in free-range systems. Supermarkets are playing their part, with the major supermarkets pledging to stop selling eggs from the remaining 40% of hens in colony cages by 2025. Some supermarkets and other retailers have gone further to extend that pledge to include processed products; that is to be welcomed.

So what is the plan? We are almost ready to go with a consultation on the caging of laying hens, but we must recognise that the transition must be done with, rather than against, the industry. As we move away from cages, we need to continue to work with the industry on improving feather cover and keel bone health, and reducing the amount of beak trimming that is done. The challenges for the sector in recent times—covid, staffing and, of course, the largest ever avian influenza outbreak—have been significant, but we will continue to take steps forward.

Broiler chickens perhaps do not fall quite so neatly into this debate, but they comprise a significant proportion of the animals reared in this country, so it is important to recognise that almost all of them—nearly 95%—are reared in barns, in confinement. Although we have better stocking densities than much of the EU, there is a great deal more to do in this area, some of which I will set out later.

As the hon. Member for Cambridge acknowledged, it has been an extremely difficult year for pig farmers. When we look at welfare in global pig systems, some 40% of our pigs are kept outdoors, so those sows have outdoor farrowing systems. The pig sector also gives us the clearest evidence of what happens when we ban a system without having a plan to help the industry through it. The ban on sow stalls 23 years ago led to a 40% decline in the UK's pig production statistics, which, truthfully, we have never recovered from.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) and my right hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) put this point extremely clearly: we must not offshore our animal welfare harms, because that would do the pig world as a whole no good at all. There are difficulties—we are bound by World Trade Organisation rules, of course—but active work is being done to establish how, if we banned a system here, we could ban imports from that system. We are working hard on that, but these things are not easy.

Sir Bill Wiggin: It would be much easier if we had honesty in food labelling, because then at least as consumers we can make a choice.

Victoria Prentis: I will get to that point.

Our consultation on pig farrowing crates is not quite ready, particularly the impact assessment on costs, and this is an industry that has really struggled over the past year. The consultation is still being worked on and clearly further work is needed. I am very much in touch with the pig industry, as we come through what has been a very difficult period. We continue to work collectively

to try to solve its problems. We are also in the middle of a serious supply chain review, looking at how contracts could be made to work better for the industry as a whole.

In order to raise standards, it is important that we have other tools at our disposal; it is not just about banning systems. I very much refute the allegation that no action has been taken over the past two years. It is important that we put this in context, because probably not since the last major period of rationing have a Government been so involved in ensuring that the food supply system remained operational, and that good-quality food was available on the shelves. I absolutely refute the suggestion that nothing has been done.

Our action plan for animal welfare was published in May last year, when we committed to working with the farming sector to support higher welfare conditions. The animal health and welfare pathway is being used to raise standards all the time, not just through banning things, but through a three-pronged attack. It states that financial rewards will be available for farmers who use higher welfare systems. It also sets out a plan for stimulating market demand—that is the labelling point—and, working hand in hand with that, for strengthening the regulatory baseline.

On pigs specifically, through the animal health and welfare pathway we will continue to improve biosecurity in order to control endemic diseases, and of course the vet visits will help in that area.

On meat chickens, through the pathway we are encouraging producers to implement the Better Chicken commitment, which requires the use of slower growing breeds and lower stocking densities. Only 5% of chickens are produced to higher standards. Frankly, we all need to interrogate where our meat comes from.

Labelling obviously plays an important part in enabling consumers to interrogate where our meat comes from, and we know that it works to stimulate market demand for higher welfare products, as we have seen with shell eggs. We have issued a call for evidence on animal welfare labelling, and last week affirmed our commitment to working on this issue in the food strategy. The food data transparency partnership will help, because the way we work with retailers is critical to changing their behaviours and forcing change from the consumer end up.

In conclusion, the Government are committed to phasing out confinement systems and supporting the industry to do so, not least to underpin UK food security. However, we need to work carefully and sensitively with the pig and poultry industries, which are both struggling with some difficult input costs and other challenges at the moment.

5.34 pm

Matt Vickers: I thank the Minister. It is good that she recognises the impact of the cost of living; the need to ensure processed eggs, as well as shelled eggs, are included in any changes; the challenges that have faced the sector; and the fact that the solution lies in working with farmers, rather than against them, to ensure we do not offshore our farming. I thank her for the work to ensure that we continue to proudly lead the world on animal welfare. I welcome that the consultation is imminent, and the commitment to end the confinement of our animals.

I pay tribute to the many hon. Members who have spoken in the debate. The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) spoke of the need to include game birds in any ban and the need for urgent action. My hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Sir Bill Wiggin)—the chicken ambassador himself—contributed with his usual vigour and authority. He said that we must ensure that farms remain profitable and competitive, that interests must be balanced, and that we need to be honest in the debate.

The hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) spoke of the great interest shown by her constituents in the subject, and of their love of animals. She paid tribute to the amazing Sir David Amess, and spoke of the international context of our legislative position. I did not realise that Nando's is on board—I will go there more regularly.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) spoke about the need for a smooth and balanced transition, and the urgent need for the consultation. My right hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) talked about the need to maximise the freedoms we have gained from Brexit and to ensure that our farmers are not undercut by imports.

The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) said that customers want the measures called for in the petition, and spoke of the need to continue our role as world leaders on animal welfare. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) spoke about the history and nature of this ongoing debate, both here and in our supermarkets and supply chains.

I thank all the petitioners and animal welfare organisations for ensuring that the welfare of our animals remains firmly on the agenda of this House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 593775, relating to the use of cages for farmed animals.

5.36 pm

Sitting suspended.

Written Statements

Monday 20 June 2022

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

UK Conformity Assessed Marking Regime: Support for Business

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully): I am pleased to announce that the Government are going further to make it easier and cheaper for businesses to move to the new UKCA product regulation regime.

Our new UKCA regime gives us the chance to take control of the way products are regulated and ensure these rules work to the benefit of business and consumers in Great Britain. The UKCA marking will become mandatory for most goods which previously used the CE and reverse epsilon markings if they are first placed on the market in Great Britain after 31 December 2022.

The Government understand that moving to this new regime has meant changes for businesses. While change is necessary, we want to take a pragmatic approach. We have been consulting with industry to understand their key concerns in the transition to the UKCA marking regime.

The Government want to make it easier for businesses to comply with the changes so we will introduce four measures to further support businesses adopting UKCA. These measures are designed to reduce compliance burdens and prevent costs that could be passed on to consumers. These changes will apply to BEIS sectors requiring the UKCA marking, other Departments will make related announcements on arrangements for their sectors as required in due course. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is making a UKCA announcement in conjunction with BEIS today, as indicated below.

These measures are as follows:

Government will reduce re-testing costs for UKCA certification, by allowing certificates provided by EU (European Union) conformity assessment bodies (CABs) issued before the end of this year to be used as a basis for UKCA marking certification—including a specific arrangement for construction products, via the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This will prevent duplication and immediate increased costs for businesses.

Government will make clear there is no need to re-test existing imported stock, as these products will be considered already placed on the Great Britain (GB) market. This will prevent the costly, and unnecessary re-labelling of existing stock for businesses.

Government will make clear that spare parts that repair or replace goods already on the GB market can meet the same requirements as the goods that they repair or replace. This will allow products and goods requiring spare parts to continue to be maintained.

Government will allow the UKCA marking and importer details to be added to products using a sticky label or on an accompanying document until 31 December 2025. This will allow business to adjust their product design to accommodate marking changes at a convenient and cost-effective time.

The Government intend to lay secondary legislation before the end of the calendar year to give effect to the changes for labelling and testing. Our guidance will be updated to reflect our changes to spare parts and existing stock.

These measures are being implemented to address the concerns we have heard through working closely with industry. Officials in the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, in collaboration with other Departments, will continue to engage actively with industry and support their preparations ahead of the full introduction of UKCA rules at the end of 2022.

[HCWS113]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

“Data: a new direction” Consultation: Government Response

The Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure (Julia Lopez): On 17 June 2022, we published the Government response to the “Data: A new direction” consultation document, and in the Queen’s Speech on 10 May 2022 it was announced that a data reform Bill will be introduced in the third Session of this Parliament.

Data is the driving force of modern economies and, by removing barriers to responsible data sharing and use, we aim to become the world’s No. 1 data destination: an open, welcoming and secure environment where companies from all over the world can innovate and grow, and where responsible data usage improves people’s lives.

It is because we have left the EU that we have the opportunity to build an independent data protection regime that works in the UK’s interests. We have the regulatory freedom to simplify some of the cumbersome parts of the UK General Data Protection Regulation and reduce the barriers of responsible data use.

The new regime will also maintain the fundamental data protection principles established by the UK GDPR. The Government remain committed to ensuring continued, high data protection standards and public trust in data, both of which will continue to be at the heart of our new regime.

The consultation response sets out how we will create a new, flexible, independent regime under which the value of data can truly be maximised. By clarifying data protection rules regarding research, we can give scientists the confidence to use data responsibly and effectively, meaning greater data-driven innovations.

We will remove some of the most prescriptive but unnecessary rules in UK GDPR, which organisations currently must follow to demonstrate compliance. This will reduce the burdens on businesses by giving them the flexibility to protect personal data in ways that work most effectively for their organisations and their clients. By reducing burdens, we can make businesses more efficient and more productive.

We will also use our repatriated “adequacy” powers from the EU to remove inappropriate barriers to the flow of UK personal data overseas, so that we can support trade and scientific collaboration as well as national security and law enforcement cooperation.

We will also make sure that there is better enforcement of data protection and privacy breaches, and we will take firmer action against nuisance callers and make it easier to stop this predatory behaviour to begin with. We will also make sure that data can be used to empower people and improve their lives.

Our reforms will directly benefit the public—we will make it easier for public bodies to share data, making public healthcare, law enforcement and Government services more effective.

The consultation response also sets out reforms to the Information Commissioner's Office—we will modernise its governance framework with an independent board and require it to take into account the impact of its activities on areas such as economic growth, innovation and competition. We will also make the ICO more accountable to the public and Parliament by setting out a range of key performance indicators and other reporting requirements.

The consultation response recognises that political parties and elected representatives frequently need to process personal data for the purposes of democratic engagement. We intend to create a clearer legal basis for such processing to occur. The intent is to allow MPs, councillors and political parties to undertake democratic engagement that they have done for decades—such as opinion surveys of local residents or targeted letters to constituents—but where GDPR has added unnecessary complexity and confusion. This builds on measures in the Data Protection Act 2018 which received broad cross-party support at the time.

The UK is firmly committed to maintaining high data protection standards, and we will continue to operate a high-quality regime that promotes growth and innovation and underpins the trustworthy use of data. EU adequacy decisions do not require an “adequate” country to have the same rules, and our view is that reform of UK legislation on personal data will be compatible with maintaining free flow of personal data from Europe.

The reforms we have set out will create a new and independent data protection regime that will confer many benefits on people, businesses and researchers, while maintaining high standards of personal data protection. The Government response to the consultation is available on www.gov.uk and I will also place a copy in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS120]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Antimicrobials: Evaluation and Purchase

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Sajid Javid): The ability of bacteria—and other types of pathogen—to develop and propagate resistance to the available therapeutic drugs and medicines, such as antibiotics, used to treat them is a significant and growing threat. Alongside extensive efforts to tackle this threat, as set out in the Government's five-year National Action Plan, we have sought to reduce the need for antibiotics. This is being achieved through both effective infection prevention and control, and through careful stewardship of the antibiotics that we have at our disposal, by

reducing inappropriate prescribing. It is also essential that we incentivise the development—by pharmaceutical companies—of new antimicrobials, which has historically been challenging. To address this challenge, we committed to develop and test a new purchasing model for antimicrobials that de-links payments for antibiotics from the volumes used.

As a result, NHS England and Improvement (NHSEI), the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) launched a joint project in July 2019 to test a “subscription-style” payment for two antibiotics, basing the annual payment on a NICE-led assessment of the value of the medicines, rather than on the volumes of drugs used. On 12 April 2022, NICE published guidance estimating the value of the two antibiotics to the NHS. This guidance informed negotiations between NHSEI and the two companies to agree payment levels in the “subscription-style” contracts.

I would like to inform the House that the contracts between NHSEI and the two pharmaceutical companies have now been signed. Payments to the companies for their antibiotics, Cefiderocol—manufactured by Shionogi—and Ceftazidime with Avibactam—manufactured by Pfizer—will start on 1 July 2022.

This world-leading project represents an important development in our approach to incentivising innovation in antimicrobial drugs and in our efforts to tackle antimicrobial resistance (AMR). We will continue to build on this work to develop routine arrangements for the evaluation and purchase of new antimicrobials as they are developed. I will be writing to my counterparts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to formally invite them to participate in these next steps, to ensure that the project can be adapted and scaled across the UK.

Maintaining momentum on our international advocacy and action on market incentives is crucial. We hope other countries will offer similar incentives in their own domestic markets, so that collectively we can achieve a meaningful incentive for global investment in antimicrobials. This project is representative of our leading role in this area, aligning with the Government's vision for a Global Britain.

[HCWS116]

Women's Health Ambassador

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): In December 2021 when we published “Our Vision for the Women's Health Strategy for England”, we announced that we would be appointing a Women's Health Ambassador.

I am pleased to announce the appointment of Professor Dame Lesley Regan DBE MD DSc FRCOG as the first ever Women's Health Ambassador for England.

The Ambassador will focus on raising the profile of women's health, increasing awareness of taboo topics and bringing a range of collaborative voices to implement the Women's Health Strategy. The Ambassador will develop networks across and outside Government to champion women's health and break down stigmas which surround particular areas of women's health, such as the menopause, endometriosis and PCOS, and mental health and wellbeing.

We will also appoint a deputy Women's Health Ambassador to maximise the positive impacts of the role. The deputy ambassador will work collaboratively with the Women's Health Ambassador to help increase awareness and build relationships with community groups and women and girls across the country.

Dame Lesley Regan is Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Imperial College's St Mary's Hospital Campus, and Honorary Consultant in Gynaecology at the Imperial College NHS Trust. She is also Honorary Secretary of the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) and the Immediate Past President (2016-2019) of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), only the second woman to ever hold this role and the first in 64 years. As President of the RCOG, she oversaw the publication of the groundbreaking Better For Women report, the findings and recommendations of which have informed the development of our Women's Health Strategy.

When we set about recruiting the Women's Health Ambassador, we heard from many highly qualified candidates who were interested in the role. I am very grateful for their interest in the role.

Next steps on the Women's Health Strategy

The Women's Health Strategy will set out an ambitious and positive new agenda to improve the health and wellbeing of women across England and reduce disparities, focusing both on the priority healthcare issues for women and key thematic priorities across the life course. I look forward to announcing the publication of the new Women's Health Strategy shortly and to working with the new Women's Health Ambassador to deliver real change for women in England.

[HCWS114]

TRANSPORT

HS2 Phase 2b Western Leg: Crewe to Manchester

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): As set out in a written ministerial statement to Parliament on 6 June 2022, the Government are today publishing a supplement to the January 2022 update to the High Speed 2 (HS2) Crewe - Manchester Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC). This supplement to the SOBC sets out the implications of removing the Golborne Link from the High Speed (Crewe - Manchester) Bill scheme.

The January 2022 update to the SOBC set out the importance of the proposed scheme in linking Manchester to the high-speed network, reducing journey times between the UK's biggest economic regions—the south-east, midlands, and north-west—and generating much needed passenger and network capacity on the West Coast Mainline (WCML), the UK's busiest mixed rail use corridor. It also outlined the scheme's central role in rebalancing the UK economy by providing the platform for economic growth and regeneration in Manchester and the North West, and its importance as the strategic enabler for Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) and the wider Integrated Rail Plan for the North and Midlands (IRP).

This scheme also included the Golborne Link, a proposed connection from the HS2 network near Hoo Green to the WCML just south of Wigan, aimed at increasing the number of HS2 services between England and Scotland.

As announced on 6 June 2022, subject to the will of Parliament, the Government no longer intend to seek powers to construct the Golborne Link as part of this Bill. As Sir Peter Hendy's Union Connectivity Review made clear the Golborne link might not resolve all the rail capacity constraints on the West Coast Mainline between Crewe and Preston. The Government will therefore take time to consider alternatives which deliver similar benefits to Scotland as the Golborne link, so long as these deliver for the taxpayer within the £96 billion envelope allocated for the Integrated Rail Plan, and to understand the deliverability of the alternatives.

HS2 is an essential factor in achieving the transformative impact of the Government's £96 billion Integrated Rail Plan, connecting our major cities, including connections between the North and Midlands. With other elements of the IRP, it will encourage businesses to invest beyond London while retaining ready access to the capital. It will make it easier for people to find high-wage, high-skilled jobs without having to travel south. This will help drive productivity and growth, benefiting the whole country.

A copy of the supplement to the Strategic Outline Business Case will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and made publicly accessible online.

[HCWS118]

Restoring Your Railway Update

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Wendy Morton): Today I am pleased to announce further development funding for nine rail schemes under the restoring your railway fund. This brings communities in Yorkshire, Staffordshire, County Durham and beyond one step closer to being reconnected to the rail network, with the transformational levelling up opportunities for jobs, homes and education that public transport provides.

The restoring your railway fund is making substantial progress to restore previously closed rail lines: the £500 million commitment is supporting the development or delivery of over 45 schemes across England and Wales, and we have already reintroduced services to the Dartmoor line between Okehampton and Exeter.

I am today announcing further funding for schemes that entered restoring your railway as early-stage ideas, which have already been supported through the Fund to develop a Strategic Outline Business Case and will now be progressing further. I am also announcing funding for proposals at more advanced stages.

The nine schemes receiving further funding with the potential to level up and reconnect communities are: the Barrow Hill line between Sheffield and Chesterfield; the Ivanhoe line between Leicester and Burton on Trent; new stations at Meir in Staffordshire, Haxby in Yorkshire, Devizes in Wiltshire and Ferryhill in County Durham; Aldridge station and line upgrade in Walsall; reinstating the Fleetwood line; and the Mid Cornwall Metro scheme for services between Newquay and Falmouth.

More than 50 years since the railways were radically reshaped during the infamous Beeching cuts of the 1960s, when thousands of miles of both track and stations were closed, the restoring your railway Fund is now focused on developing and delivering the benefits of the schemes within its portfolio. If delivered, these lines and stations will make a real contribution to levelling up the country, reinvigorating high streets and breathing new life into previously cut off areas.

Alongside this announcement we are publishing a restoring your railway fund update, which sets out progress on all schemes that have received funding and will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses, as well as being publicly accessible online through the www.gov.uk website.

[HCWS117]

HGV Levy Reform Consultation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Trudy Harrison): My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton) has made the following ministerial statement.

Today the Government are publishing a consultation on reforming the heavy goods vehicle (HGV) levy. The HGV levy has been suspended since 1 August 2020 to support the haulage sector and aid pandemic recovery efforts. Today's consultation seeks industry views on two ways in which the levy could be reformed when the suspension ends as planned on 31 July 2023.

Firstly, the Government are considering reforming the HGV levy so that it is more reflective of the environmental performance of the vehicle. The levy would be restructured to be based on the

weight of the vehicle, as an indicative proxy for carbon dioxide emissions. If this reform were carried out, the majority of UK vehicles will pay less or the same than they did before the previous levy was suspended. The alternative would be to continue with the current structure and rates.

Second, the Government are minded to reform the levy liability for foreign HGVs, such that they pay only when driving on major roads. This is to clarify that the levy design is unambiguously in line with the Government's international obligations.

The consultation will be published on the Department for Transport website and will run for four weeks.

[HCWS115]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Office for Nuclear Regulation: Corporate Plan 2022-23

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): My noble Friend The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Baroness Stedman-Scott) has made the following written statement.

Later today I will lay before this House the Office for Nuclear Regulation corporate plan 2022-2023. This document will also be published on the ONR website.

I can confirm, in accordance with schedule 7, section 25(3) of the Energy Act 2013, that there have been no exclusions to the published documents on the grounds of national security.

[HCWS119]

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