

This week at Holyrood

Covid-19 Update

The First Minister's update focused on the emergence of the new Omicron variant which has led to the introduction of tighter regulations on self-isolation and international travel. Mandatory hotel quarantine has been reintroduced for arrivals from Southern Africa and travellers returning from all other countries (except the Common Travel Area) have to self-isolate until they receive a negative result from a Day 2 PCR test. Close contacts of suspected Omicron cases will also be asked to self-isolate, regardless of their vaccination status. While we await further information from scientists on the risks posed by the new variant, the First Minister has urged individuals and businesses to be extra vigilant and increase their compliance with existing measures. Aside from the self-isolation for vaccinated contacts of Omicron cases, there are no additional measures specifically affecting construction.

Modal shift (rail journeys)

- Richard Leonard MSP (Lab) asked the Transport Minister what action he is taking to encourage 'modal shift' (ie. persuading road users to travel by rail). The Minister said Scotrail has been charged with producing a market growth strategy from April 2022 that develops and implements appropriate products and services to address post-Covid markets, in order to deliver increased revenue and passenger growth against a backdrop of net zero carbon and modal shift.
- Mr Leonard also called on the government to bring the Caledonian sleeper route, currently operated by Serco, back into public ownership and demanded action to address the trade union's concerns about alleged bullying and harassment of staff.

Co-operation on Infrastructure

- Finlay Carson MSP (Con) criticized the Scottish Government for not engaging with the Union Connectivity Review and welcomed the £40 million which the UK Government has made available for preparatory work to upgrade the A75 and A77, subject to agreement between the two governments.
- The Transport Minister said the Chancellor's spending review did not provide sufficient scope for an infrastructure stimulus and that the levelling-up fund was disbursed across the UK, despite previous commitments otherwise, which in turn reduced capital funding for Scotland.

Union Connectivity Review

- In response to a question from Graham Simpson MSP (Con), the First Minister said she did not think there was much in the union connectivity review for Scotland. Ms Sturgeon said the review was an attempted 'power grab' by taking decisions on transport priorities away from Scottish ministers. She said that instead of agreeing potential infrastructure investment with UK ministers, any additional funding should be made available through the established budgetary processes to allow the Scottish Parliament to make its own decisions.
- She also cast doubt on the promise of funding for preparatory work on the A75, highlighting that an earlier promise in the review for a bridge linking Scotland and Northern Ireland had fallen by the wayside.

CPG on Construction

- The Cross Party Group on Construction met virtually on Tuesday evening, chaired by Scottish Labour MSP Monica Lennon. Paul McLennan MSP (SNP) was also in attendance for part of the meeting.
- Will Arnold, Head of Climate Action from the Institution of Structural Engineers, gave a presentation on structures and the climate emergency.
- Dr Faye Wade from the University of Edinburgh gave a presentation on “Building on our strengths in the Repair, Maintenance, and Improvement sector to retrofit UK homes.”
- This was followed by a discussion on the role of the CPG in future, including how the platform can be used to hold the government to account and influence the agenda on key industry issues. The next meeting will be held in February in the Scottish Parliament, subject to Covid guidance.

Economy and Fair Work Committee

- CECA Scotland recently submitted a response to the committee’s inquiry on supply chain issues. You can read the response of all 32 organisations which contributed to the inquiry on [the committee’s website](#).
- The committee has begun hearing oral evidence and the final report will be published in early 2022.

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

- The committee has agreed to consider a public petition calling on “Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to instigate a public inquiry regarding the political and financial management of the A83 rest and be thankful project which is to provide a permanent solution for the route.”
- The committee is also considering a public petition calling on “Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent feasibility study to investigate scenarios for reducing the impact of the M8 between the M74 and Glasgow Cathedral including, specifically, complete removal and repurposing of the land.”

Net Zero, Energy and Transport

- The Committee has launched an inquiry into the role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland.
- The inquiry aims to seek out the main barriers at a local level, to Scotland reaching its net zero targets. It will consider what practical steps councils are taking to break them down, in partnership with business, the voluntary sector, and local communities. It will also highlight areas where change will be needed if councils are to play a full role in the helping us achieve the goal of a net zero Scotland.
- In particular, the committee wants to know whether procurement decisions are effectively aligning with net zero goals. If you have experienced any barriers dealing with local government partners in this regard, please contact jonathan@cecascotland.co.uk to discuss your experience. Your views can be shared with the committee as an anonymous case study to inform the inquiry.

Questions

MSP	ID	Question	Answer
Colin Smyth	<u>S6W-04459</u>	To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reopen the Dumfries-Stranraer railway line.	The reopening of the Dumfries-Stranraer railway line is being considered within the second Strategic Transport Projects Review. (https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/written-questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-04459)
Stephen Kerr	<u>S6W-04485</u>	To ask the Scottish Government how many employees have been (a) trained and (b) retrained through the North East Economic Recovery and Skills Fund.	The North East Economic Recovery and Skills Fund (NEERSF) launched in August 2021. The first performance reporting from the delivery partnership is due to be received in mid to late December. (https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/written-questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-04485)
Stephen Kerr	<u>S6W-04486</u>	To ask the Scottish Government how many businesses have been supported through the North East Economic Recovery and Skills Fund since 1 January 2021.	Referred to answer above
Jamie Greene	<u>S6W-04394</u>	To ask the Scottish Government how much it has invested in (a) maintaining and (b) improving rail infrastructure in West Scotland in each year since 2016.	The SG does not hold all of the information because responsibility and oversight for Network Rail investment is shared between Transport Scotland, UK Government and the Office for Road and Rail. (https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/written-questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-04394)

Next week's business

Tuesday

- The First Minister will give a Covid-19 update.
- There will be a Scottish Government debate on “Delivering a Just Transition to Net Zero and Climate Resilience for Scotland”

Wednesday

- Net Zero, Energy and Transport Questions:
 - Graham Simpson: To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the report, A Vision for Scotland's Railways , produced for Scotland's rail unions.

For further details, please contact CECA Scotland Social Media and Public Affairs Manager, Jonathan McAveety, at jonathan@cecascotland.co.uk

- Michelle Thomson: To ask the Scottish Government when it last met Falkirk Council to discuss public transport and connectivity within the rural areas of the Falkirk East constituency, and what was discussed.
- Finlay Carson: To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to improve road safety on the trunk road network.
- There will be a members' debate led by Graham Simpson MSP (Con) on the East Kilbride Rail Link Dualling. This is the text of the motion submitted:
 - That the Parliament notes the reported announcement by Transport Scotland that the single track part of the rail line between East Kilbride and Glasgow is not now going to be dualled as, it understands, had previously been promised, and that the money will be spent elsewhere; sees this is a missed opportunity to persuade more people to travel by train; notes the view that improving public transport connections is vital if Scotland is to achieve a shift away from cars, and further notes calls on the Scottish Government to reconsider what it believes to be this short-sighted move.

Thursday

- First Minister's Questions
- Scottish Budget Ministerial Statement