

Queensferry Crossing work ongoing until next autumn

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3 Oct 2018



Repair works to the new Forth bridge will continue well into the autumn of 2019, two years after it opened.

MSPs were told today that delays had caused snagging repairs on the Queensferry Crossing to be pushed back.

Transport Scotland director Michelle Rennie admitted to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee that the contractor “has experienced difficulties in mobilising resources and this has had a significant impact on his progress”.

An updated chart of repairs showed the slipping of a number of maintenance issues, including the commissioning of cable maintenance access cradles which would now happen in June, and bearing remedials a month later.

Outstanding painting work won't take place until October.

The Scottish Conservatives said the SNP's hurried approach in ensuring the bridge opened on time may lead to commuters facing disruption further down the line.

Scottish Conservative transport spokesman Jamie Greene said:

“Commuters will see news of more repairs needed, and conclude that the SNP is now playing catch-up after hurrying to open the bridge triumphantly, at the expense of commuters and drivers.

“The fact the bridge is architecturally impressive does not excuse any disruption that will be caused to drivers due to its premature opening.

“There's never been a back-patting session quite like it from the nationalists after the Queensferry Crossing was officially unveiled last year.

“But now we learn the substantial backlog of snagging works will continue well into the autumn of next year, two years after it originally opened.

“The Queensferry Crossing is a magnificent piece of work, but if journey times have not improved and motorists are facing years of roadworks, you can understand scepticism around this flagship project.”

'Open government' plan to banish legacy of SNP's secret Scotland

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30 Sep 2018



The Scottish Conservatives are to set out a plan for open government to improve trust in and the performance of public services.

The proposals, published next week, will also consign years of SNP secrecy in government to history.

The blueprint ahead of the 2021 Holyrood elections follows on from a policy document released in the spring, and signals the beginning of a campaign for a Scottish Conservative government.

Policies which would be adopted by Ruth Davidson's Scottish Government include:

- All public services being more accountable, including the transparent and regular publishing of statistics
- Developing a culture of openness across all of Scotland's taxpayer-funded organisations, and encouraging more innovation when it comes to the use of data
- The creation of institutions which guard against government centralisation and encourage devolving of more decision-making locally
- A more transparent budget process, and the publication in one place of all civil servants across the public sector paid more than the First Minister
- Banning politicisation of the NHS logo

Policy co-ordinator Donald Cameron, the Highlands and Islands MSP, also said a Scottish Conservative government would embrace technology.

Those ideas include the ability for people to text crime reports to the police, a scheme similar to system the British Transport Police operate, and an online booking system alternative for all GP practices.

The paper also suggests focusing on regionally-driven economic growth, as is happening in parts of England, improving school autonomy and handing more taxation powers to local authorities.

'Open government – a discussion paper' exposes how the SNP has failed to be accountable and transparent in government, and sets out the ways in which that has harmed public perception and the performance of public services.

Scottish Conservative policy co-ordinator Donald Cameron said:

"The Scottish Conservatives had a successful election campaign in 2016 on the basis the people of Scotland wanted us to be a strong opposition to the SNP at Holyrood.

"Now the time has come for us to set out how we would govern.

"This blueprint is very much the start in terms of us talking to voters across the country, setting out our ideas, and listening to what they have to say in response.

"The SNP has been secretive in government, completely failing to offer any kind of transparency or accountability.

"Not only does that erode the trust and faith of taxpayers, but it limits our ability to improve the performance of agencies in charge of health, education, transport and a range of other devolved responsibilities.

"We've now set out plans for that to change, for people to access more data that's in the public interest, and open government up to those who have good ideas on how to make things better.

"This will be a central plank of our campaign for government, and lays the ground for a thriving, economically successful Scotland at the heart of a strong UK."

[Reduced paediatric service at St John's to continue 'indefinitely'](#)

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27 Sep 2018



The partial closure of a vital children's ward is set to continue "indefinitely" – after the SNP admitted its staff recruitment crisis was to blame.

Addressing Holyrood today, health secretary Jeane Freeman said while a plan

for improvement was underway, the paediatric unit at St John's Hospital would continue to send patients to Edinburgh at night.

She said that staffing levels were "fragile", meaning it couldn't continue as a 24/7 operation, and conceded she was "anxious" about the continued closure.

However, she stopped short of setting a date for when the full service would resume, instead saying NHS Lothian would give it "the highest level of priority".

The Scottish Conservatives said the latest development was more evidence of a "downgrade" at the Livingston hospital, something campaigners have been highlighting for more than a decade.

In August, the party revealed how around 500 child patients had been transferred to the Edinburgh Sick Kids – 20 miles away – since the move.

They also called for the SNP government to make it an accredited paediatric teaching hospital to help safeguard its future.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"This statement from the new health secretary doesn't suggest the SNP is any further forward in reopening the children's ward at St John's.

"The hospital and the people of West Lothian have been the victim of the SNP's shambolic workforce planning.

"For years the SNP has neglected the fact we have an ageing and increasing population, and ignored the challenge of an NHS retirement boom.

"That's left wards like the children's unit in St John's unable to cope – forcing a partial closure which now looks set to go on indefinitely.

"It's the ultimate self-fulfilling prophecy, and these warm words change nothing on the ground.

"Still parents across a huge slice of central Scotland do not know when they will be able to count on their local hospital again."

[Sturgeon told to act on flu vaccine fiasco](#)

27 Sep 2018



Nicola Sturgeon has been told to act on Scotland's flu vaccine fiasco, after it emerged up to half a million pensioners could be forced to source their own jabs.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said botched procurement by the SNP government had led to pensioners aged between 65 and 74 missing out on the latest vaccination against the potentially deadly bug.

At First Minister's Questions today, she highlighted the case of Perth pensioner Harold Laing, 72, who had to go to his local Boots chemist after being turned away by GPs.

She asked why the SNP government had seen fit to fund the upgraded immunisation for over 75s, but not for pensioners aged 65 to 74, who are also identified as being at risk from seasonal flu.

Last winter, the number of flu deaths rocketed from 71 to more than 300.

Now, with a couple of months to go until the more severe weather hits, the Scottish Conservatives urged the SNP government to ensure more pensioners can access the enhanced aTIV vaccine.

The SNP had previously argued that there is a shortage in supply, something the manufacturer has since denied.

In fact, it stated the only people missing out on the enhanced jab were those who ordered late.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"With only a couple of months before winter really bites, the SNP government needs to get its finger out.

"It's completely unacceptable that more than half a million pensioners are being turned away from their GP and being told to fend for themselves when it comes to accessing this vital medical treatment.

"There was a huge rise in the number of flu deaths in Scotland last year, and that should ring alarm bells for this SNP government.

"Winter shouldn't come as a surprise to the SNP, and nor should an increasing and ageing population.

"There is now only limited time to get on and make sure vulnerable pensioners aren't being sent out onto the high street to track down their own flu jab."

[Calls for Mackay to announce Scottish budget by mid-November](#)

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- Calls for Mackay to announce Scottish budget by mid-November

26 Sep 2018



The Scottish Conservatives are calling on the SNP finance secretary Derek Mackay to bring his budget forward to mid-November to allow more time for parliamentary scrutiny.

Phillip Hammond announced today that the UK budget will be revealed on Monday the 29th of October.

This means if the same three-week period between Scottish and UK budgets was used as in previous years, then the SNP should bring their budget to Holyrood on the 20th of November.

This would allow more time for the budget to be debated and scrutinised, unlike last year when Holyrood went into recess shortly after the SNP's spending plans were revealed.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser MSP said:

“With Philip Hammond having announced his budget date, it means that Derek Mackay can let us know when he plans to announce the SNP's spending plans.

“Three weeks is more than enough time to prepare his budget, which means he should be revealing his budget by mid-November.

“This would allow Parliament to have far more time to analyse his budget, as opposed in previous years when we've had barely any time to study it before recess.

“Any attempt from Derek Mackay to delay his budget beyond this date could only be seen as an attempt to try and avoid thorough parliamentary scrutiny.”