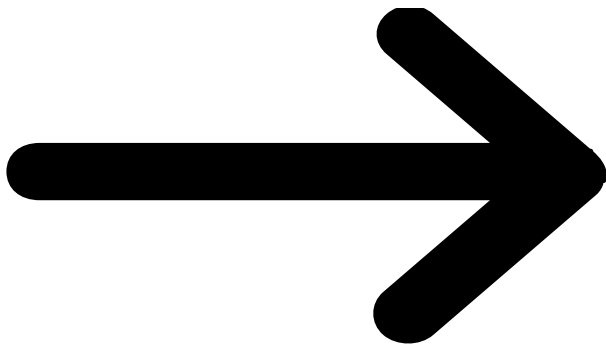


SNP must make trains a priority after thousands of cancellations revealed

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- SNP must make trains a priority after thousands of cancellations revealed

20 Dec 2018



The SNP has been told to take action on Scotland's railways, after it emerged there have been more than 35,000 cancellations since 2011.

Scottish Conservative interim leader Jackson Carlaw demanded improvements, adding that the train network must be "fit for purpose" in 2019.

He also revealed that, in the last eight years, ScotRail have suffered 16,087 full cancellations, and 19,493 part cancellations.

However, at First Minister Questions today, Nicola Sturgeon claimed she wanted even more powers over rail, despite not being able to deliver on what was currently devolved.

Mr Carlaw also criticised consecutive transport ministers, first Humza Yousaf and then Michael Matheson, for failing to act on train failures despite "tough talk".

Scottish Conservative interim leader Jackson Carlaw said:

"Punctuality on our trains is at its worst in more than a decade, and thousands of cancellations have been revealed.

"Train passengers are owed an apology from the SNP for this disgraceful level of service.

"But instead of giving passengers a break, the SNP government has waived sanctions that would have punished operators for missing targets.

"It's classic SNP – it talks tough, then two years down the line takes no action to actually sort things out.

"All the while passengers are waiting on platforms, trains are late, and millions of pounds are lost to the Scottish economy.

"The SNP government needs to get Scotland's rail network fit for purpose for 2019."

[Over a third of Scottish health boards officially on the brink of financial crisis](#)

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20 Dec 2018



Over a third of Scotland's health boards have been escalated to 'Stage 3 or above' of the NHS Board Performance Escalation Framework which means they need specific interventions, with one unable to deliver effective care.

In a letter to a Holyrood committee, the Chief Executive of NHS Scotland, Paul Gray, confirmed that there are five Health Boards currently classified as Stage 3 or above in the NHS Board Performance Escalation Framework.

The NHS Board Performance Escalation Framework outlines the stages from 1 to 5 that categorises all NHS Boards, with 1 being acceptable and 5 where a Board is operating under ministerial intervention due to significant difficulty.

NHS Boards should be operating at Stage 1 or at a 'steady state'. Stage 5 represents a Board in the most serious stages of difficulty, that has an 'organisational structure or configuration, which is unable to deliver effective care'.

One board, NHS Tayside is classified as Stage 5, two boards, NHS Highland and NHS Borders are at Stage 4 and NHS Ayrshire and Arran and NHS Forth Valley are both at stage 3.

While three of these health boards, Tayside, Highland and Borders, are well known to have significant difficulties, it has not been widely reported that NHS Ayrshire and Arran, and NHS Forth Valley are also classified at Stage 3 escalation.

Both health boards classified as stage three due to “Significant variation from plan; risks materialising; tailored support required.” This requires a response that includes a formal recovery plan agreed with the Scottish Government.

NHS Highland and NHS Borders are classed as Stage 4. This is defined as “Significant risks to delivery, quality, financial performance or safety; senior level external support required.” This requires a transformation team which reports directly to the Director General and CEO NHS Scotland.

Currently only NHS Tayside is at stage 5, the most extreme escalation which gives ministers powers of intervention due to the severity of the situation.

The Scottish Conservatives have therefore accused the SNP of woeful mismanagement of the Scottish NHS as many health boards are on the brink of financial crisis.

Miles Briggs, Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary said;

“Over a third of Scottish health boards are now regarded as being in significant trouble, deviating from their own plans and in need of support.

“This shows that five Scottish health boards are officially on the brink of financial crisis.

“The fact is that NHS Tayside has now been escalated to stage five on the escalation framework, despite SNP government intervention.

“After 11 years of the SNP mismanaging our health service we now have over a third of our health boards unable to operate properly or meet the needs of their communities.

“Indeed, SNP financial mismanagement of our Scottish NHS has seen SNP Ministers forced to write off £150 million of NHS debt.

“Yet again the SNP has shown that it cannot continue to be trusted with our health service.”

[SNP budget is a “kick in the teeth” for rural communities](#)

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- SNP budget is a “kick in the teeth” for rural communities



The SNP has failed to support the rural economy and has instead made swingeing cuts to the Scottish rural affairs in the 2019-20 budget delivered to the Scottish Parliament this week.

Despite claims that the SNP government will invest in the rural economy, the budget shows that they will actually cut business development by 13.3 per cent; agri-environment measures by 7.3 per cent; and LEADER by 10.9 per cent.

In addition, the SNP has failed to commit to supporting farmers working in less favoured areas and instead they have reduced funding for Less Favoured Area Support Scheme by £14 million in real terms.

Lastly, the SNP budget fails to enable new entrants into farming. Level 4 of the budget reiterates that new entrants schemes are closed to applications as they have committed the full SRDP allocation. However, the SNP have failed to commit any funding for a similar scheme.

The digital connectivity budget has also been cut to £32.9 million, despite the SNP commitment to spend £600 million to deliver superfast broadband by 2021. There is an urgent need to provide broadband to, and connect, rural communities, so this is yet another setback for those communities.

The Scottish Conservatives have said that this SNP budget fails to support the long term future of rural communities and is instead a “kick in the teeth”.

Donald Cameron, Scottish Conservative shadow rural affairs secretary said:

“This SNP budget absolutely fails to address the issues faced by rural communities and businesses across Scotland.

“Indeed, the cuts to rural business development are counter-productive in the extreme and will erode the sustainability of rural communities.

“Critically, the failure to invest in new entrants to farming programmes or broadband poses significant short term challenges for farms.

“The SNP claim that rural Scotland is a priority, yet with everything they do, they show that, to them, rural Scotland is dispensable.

“Farmers, tourism businesses, and the communities that are built around them are all poorer for this budget.

“This is nothing less than a kick in the teeth for rural Scotland.”

[Scottish Conservatives oppose prisoner voting](#)

14 Dec 2018



The Scottish Government has today launched a consultation on prisoner voting.

In a written answer the Scottish Government has confirmed that it intends to give prisoners the vote but seek views on the appropriate length of term prisoners would be serving.

Scottish Conservative equalities spokesman Annie Wells said:

“The Scottish Conservatives are the only party that oppose prisoners having the right to vote.

“The committee report correctly identified that there are significant logistical difficulties with organising voting in prison, regardless of the length of sentence.

“Our focus is on ensuring that victims are the centre of our justice system, not the criminal.

“Along with the presumption against sentences of less than 12 months, this proposal is another soft-touch justice message from the SNP.

“Our message is clear. If you break the law and require to be removed from society, you will not be allowed to vote.”

[Opioid overdose figures exposes need for new drugs plan](#)

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14 Dec 2018



Almost 2,600 people were admitted to Scottish hospitals due to an overdose from opioids last year.

The figures, revealed in a Scottish parliamentary written answer to Miles Briggs, Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary, also highlight that opioid overdose has increased by 17 percent since 2007, meaning that over 26,000 people have been admitted to Scottish hospitals due to an opioid overdose in the last ten years.

The statistics also show that opioid overdose has increased by 75 percent in the last twenty years.

Opioids are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain relievers available legally by prescription, such as oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), codeine, morphine, and many others.

The Scottish Conservatives have said that this is further evidence of an increasing opioid problem in Scotland that is not currently being tackled effectively.

Miles Briggs, Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary said:

“Opioid use, addiction and overdose is clearly a serious and increasing problem in Scotland.

“The SNP’s plan to tackle illegal drug use and addiction is not working and is simply maintaining dependency.

“The SNP has failed to stop the steady increase of opioid use and almost 2,600 people overdosed and found themselves in hospital last year alone.

“The Scottish Conservative plan to tackle drug addiction would give every problem drug user a Life Plan and would ensure that 20 percent more Scots accessed treatment.

“Our plan would tackle addiction head on and halve the level of drugs deaths in Scotland.

“The SNP is woefully complacent regarding Scotland’s drug use. The problem is getting worse and it is destroying people’s lives.

“The SNP must take action now, focus on rehabilitation and recovery and stop this devastating cycle of drug use, overdose and death.”