I wish to complain regarding the undemocratic nature of the procedures currently in force for consultation on Private Bills and objections thereto, with particular reference to the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill, and request that you place my complaint before the committee appointed to consider the Bill for their comments.

On 11 February 2004 I wrote to the then Transport Minister, expressing concern at the total lack of public consultation to date and concluded, "I would therefore like to know when local residents will be told what is happening as regards the proposed rail link and when they will be allowed to comment on it. I trust that we are not going to be presented with a 'fait accompli' already agreed by the Scottish Executive, SPT and Renfrewshire Council'. The Railway Policy Manager, replied on 25 March 2004 (Ref. 2004/0005369OR), to the effect that SPT was preparing a Bill for consideration by the Scottish Parliament and as part of that process would be required to consult with local interests on their proposals.

However, by the time the public was belatedly admitted to consultation by SPT, i.e from 1/11/2004 to 11/2/2005, the route for the link had already been fixed, no provision had been made to reserve any land for possible alternative routes, and the only option offered during SPT's so-called, tick-box, 'consultation' exercise was a choice between an embankment or a viaduct across St. James Park! In short, my prediction as to the public being presented with a 'fait accompli' had proved to be correct!

Despite this, (writing as a former administrator in the railway and shipping industries and as a regular user of the current airport bus services) I sent SPT a detailed 19-page submission containing my objections to the proposed St. James Link and supporting a more socially useful link via Braehead and Renfrew instead. In my submission I expressed, inter alia, serious doubts concerning patronage (in view of frequently lightly loaded buses, the intensive nature of the proposed rail service and the limited number of stops (3)), financial viability and high levels of public subsidy required (the initial consultant's report commissioned by the Executive from Sinclair, Knight Merz having been positively damning in this respect - but quietly ignored by the Executive!); the proposed link's failure to deal with vastly increased road usage at the Braehead and Renfrew Riverside developments, and the inevitable necessity to curb air travel in order to tackle climate change, which will render the St. James link even more of a white elephant in future.

Little did I realise that I was in fact, "a poacher complaining to the gamekeeper", since SPT and the Executive are clearly determined that the link will proceed at all costs and simply do not wish to consider any opposing views. Nor would I have believed that important concerns such as the above, which, (if feedback at SPT's various public meetings I attended is anything to go by) are held by many others, would be regarded as undeserving of consideration by the committee considering the bill!
Now prospective objectors find that, under Scottish Executive rules, they have to pay £20 to lodge an objection to the Bill. That is bad enough, but they also find that, having stumped up £20, their objections will be deemed inadmissible unless they are personally "adversely affected by the bill", no refund is made and there is no right of appeal. Then, even if one's objection is initially accepted, the committee considering the bill can still reject it at a later stage, once again with no refund or right of appeal! Even MSP's from affected constituencies are barred from any involvement in consideration of the bill.

What I have learned from this exercise is that the Private Bills procedure is totally undemocratic, since it is clearly designed to avoid consideration by the Parliamentary committee of any meaningful comment by members of the general public. It is therefore virtually inevitable that any proposed major infrastructure project will receive authorisation, notwithstanding serious public concerns. Unfortunately, as noted in my recent submission regarding the proposed Planning Bill, that legislation is likely to be even more of a "Developer's Charter". It is indeed depressing that our so-called 'democracy' (which we are now trying to impose on certain war-torn Middle Eastern nations!) has come to this sad state of affairs.

I look forward to receiving the committee's comments.