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- Further Queensferry Crossing delay a 'huge blow'

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The Scottish Conservatives have heavily criticised the SNP after the economy secretary announced that the new Queensferry Crossing will now not be completed until late summer at the earliest.

It represents another delay in the Scottish Government's timetable, that originally estimated that the bridge would be open last December.

The SNP had repeatedly pledged that the bridge would be completed on time, but this is already the second delay to the completion date that has been announced.

It also comes after the Forth Road Bridge was shut twice over the past few months, causing huge delays to the thousands of commuters who use it every day.

Questions are now being asked about when Keith Brown knew of the delay, with many of those involved in the project having predicted further delays in recent weeks.

Scottish Conservative transport & infrastructure spokesman Liam Kerr said:

"This delay will come as a huge blow to the many commuters who travel across the Forth every single day.

"They have already had to deal with massive disruption over the past two months due to closures on the current Forth Road Bridge, and now we learn that the Queensferry Crossing is months behind schedule.

"The SNP assured us that this project would be delivered on time, but these promises have proven to be worthless as, once again, we see the completion date slipping.

"It is simply unacceptable, and the economy secretary needs to explain why this delay has occurred and what the Scottish Government are going to do to ensure the new timescale is kept to.

"There are also underlying questions about how long Keith Brown has known about this issues. Many contractors had been hinting at delays in the previous few weeks, so if they knew it was going to be delayed, why didn't

the minister?

“It points to someone who is either hopelessly out of touch with this project, or someone who was waiting for a busy news day in order to bury bad news.”

[Instead of deflecting and ducking the Justice Secretary should accept that she failed her first test in the job and apologise – Richard Burgon](#)

Richard

Burgon MP, Labour’s Shadow Justice Secretary, responding to recent comments from Lords Neuberger and Thomas before the Lords Constitution Committee, said:

“Liz

Truss encouraged the judiciary to speak out and now two of them have – both to criticise her failure to defend the job they do. Instead of deflecting and ducking, the Justice Secretary should accept that she failed her first test in the job and apologise.”

[Andrew Gimson’s Commons sketch: May renounces cherry-picking and promises to be a good Unionist](#)

There will be no cherry-picking. We will respect the European ban on that delightful but unrealistically self-indulgent activity. So said Theresa May, in a statement which was clearly intended to show the Europeans, and the Scots Nats, that she can be relied on to negotiate in good faith.

The position on cake is not yet quite so clear. As Jeremy Corbyn observed, in the course of a reply which was well above his usual standard, the Foreign Secretary thinks we can have our cake and eat it, while the Chancellor says

we cannot have our cake and eat it.

Corbyn is right to say that although the language used is “flippant”, the difference in outlook is genuine. The Prime Minister seems to lean towards the Chancellor’s view: not for her the ebullitions of evasive optimism behind which Boris Johnson sometimes conceals his real opinions.

And yet she is, in the end, an optimist. She believes Brexit will work, and knows what is needed to make it work, namely a settlement which works for every part of the United Kingdom.

How platitudinous that statement sounds. But May will stand or fall as a Unionist, and by her frequent heartfelt references yesterday to the UK she confirmed that she knows this.

She can only beat off the challenge from the Scots Nats by demonstrating that life is better and richer within the UK, and preserve peace in Northern Ireland by reaching a settlement with the Republic that works for everyone.

No wonder she resorts even more often than most politicians to a small number of stock phrases, including “a country that works for everyone”. Such safe, inclusive language is meant to reassure everyone that she will be a safe, inclusive negotiator.

As the Duke of Wellington remarked, when the great task at last arrived of making an enduring European peace after the Napoleonic wars: “Be sure that in politics there is nothing stable except that which is in everyone’s interests.”

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[Teresa Pearce responds to NAO report on 100 per cent business rate retention scheme](#)

Teresa Pearce, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, responding to the National Audit Office report on the 100 per cent business rate retention scheme, said:

“Today’s report confirms what we have long suspected: the Government is playing dangerous games with local government finances, and in turn, is putting our vital public services in jeopardy.

“The NAO have stated that implementing 100 per cent business rates retention before the Government’s Fair Funding Review has been published will result in an untested and potentially unfair system being imposed on already struggling councils. In the context of seven years of brutal and relentless cuts to local government, that is a risk that councils cannot afford. That is why Labour has continually called for 100 per cent business rate retention to be delayed until after the Fair Funding Review is complete.

“The report also finds that the research has not been done into whether business rate retention is genuinely driving economic growth, and the resources do not exist to do so sufficiently. As it stands, this scheme is ideologically-driven but lacks any solid evidence base.

“Local government is facing a £5.8 billion funding gap by 2020. There is a national crisis in social care with 1.2 million frail elderly people and one in five vulnerable disabled people being left lonely and isolated. Libraries, youth centres and Sure Start centres have closed. Child protection services are creaking, and homelessness is rising. Public services provided by local councils are the lifeblood of our communities and the Government must think more carefully before implementing these potentially catastrophic changes.”