

“Fresh start” is just “tinkering with failed policies”

The First Minister announced in The Scottish Parliament on Tuesday that under his leadership there will be a “fresh start”. He published a new policy document outlining what each Cabinet Secretary will concentrate on for the next three years.

In a speech to The Scottish Parliament, Humza Yousaf outlined changes to previous policies such as the Deposit Return Scheme which will be delayed until March 2024, and a back to the drawing board approach for alcohol advertising. The positive actions outlined include a six month pilot of removing peak time rail fares which will come into effect in October, six new ferry vessels, an increase in the number of EV charging points in Scotland to at least 6,000 and £1.3 billion to continue the Scottish Child Payment for the next three years.

In addition the Scottish educational system will once more be measured on its performance with international data provided by The Trends in International Mathematics and Science (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS) by reinstating Scotland’s participation in both schemes. The government will also agree legislation giving Scottish councils powers to raise money from a Tourist Tax.

The proposals were laid out in Mr Yousaf’s first big speech to

The Scottish Parliament which reconvened on Tuesday after the Easter recess.

He set out his plans in a video on social media after proposing them to the parliament:

New leadership, a fresh start for Scotland.

First Minister [@HumzaYousaf](#) sets out his vision for Scotland and the missions this government will deliver on.

Read all the details at <https://t.co/I2YdASMdpGpic.twitter.com/YZ68ivBHsS>

– Scottish Government (@scotgov) [April 18, 2023](#)

Rail Fares

With regard to the pilot project on rail fares the TSSA say that the decision to scrap peak fares on ScotRail for six months was first announced in December 2022 by then Deputy First Minister John Swinney. Humza Yousaf confirmed that the “pilot programme” will run from October 2023, and the union points out that this will be ten months after Mr Swinney’s announcement.

TSSA, together with the other rail unions, had called for peak time rail fares to be scrapped in their report “A Vision for Scotland’s Railway” which was published in November 2021.

Interim General Secretary Peter Pendle said: “The scrapping of peak time ScotRail fares is welcome news – but as with many things on ScotRail, it’s been delayed!

“Commuters will still be paying peak rate rail fares for another six months – that’s simply not good enough in this cost of living crisis.

“When the peak fares are finally scrapped, this cannot just be a short-term gimmick. Hard-working Scottish commuters don’t deserve to be punished for travelling at a time of day that suits their employers. ScotRail peak fares must be abolished for good!”

Scottish Conservatives

Scottish Conservative deputy leader Meghan Gallacher MSP said: “It’s clear that Humza Yousaf is merely tinkering with Nicola Sturgeon’s failing policy agenda and continuing to be led by the extremist Greens, instead of delivering the fresh leadership Scotland needs right now.

“It will dismay the majority of the Scottish public that campaigning for independence is the top priority for Humza Yousaf.

“Scotland needs national leadership focused on tackling the big challenges – the global cost-of-living crisis, an NHS on its knees thanks to the First Minister and a sluggish economy. Instead, we have a nationalist leader continuing to appeal to his hopelessly divided party.

“Tellingly, given the scandal engulfing his party, the First Minister refused to say whether the SNP remains in debt to Peter Murrell, and when it intends to repay that loan.

“We welcome the SNP’s U-turn on Scottish schools re-joining international league tables. It was shameful that our schools were withdrawn from international rankings in the first place – this was a cowardly move by the SNP to conceal their failings on education.

“However no one seriously believes that this government will close the attainment gap by the end of this parliament, when they have abjectly failed to make progress on this long-standing vow for years.”

Scottish Labour

Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar said “Some of the announcements in the First Minister’s statement today are welcome, some of it is undoubtedly well intentioned, but much of it is rehashed promises from the past that have never been delivered.

“But what Humza Yousaf can’t escape from is that he is not now running a functioning government.

“This is an SNP that is mired in scandal, mired in division, talking to themselves and about themselves.

“The crisis that now engulfs the SNP is not just an indication of how they govern their party, but also how they govern our country.

“For 16 years their culture of command and control, lack of transparency, and secrecy has covered-up financial mismanagement and incompetence on a massive scale.

“No amount of spin or the pretence of a reset is going to hide what is now becoming clearer to the public every day.

“Our country is crying out for leadership, for hope, for new ideas and a new vision to confront the twin national crises.

“A cost of living crisis with families struggling to pay the bills and an NHS crisis with patients struggling to access life saving treatment.

“Continuity won’t cut it.

“Incompetence has consequences.

“Frankly, Scotland deserves better.

“It doesn’t need to be like this.

“This isn’t as good as it gets.

“Change is possible.

“We can have a government that tackles the cost of living crisis and brings down bills.

“We can grow the economy, invest in the opportunities of the future.

“We can restore and renew our NHS.

“We can have a government that puts the people’s priorities first – but after 3 weeks it’s already clear that it can’t be this First Minister and this SNP government.”

Liberal Democrats

Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Alex Cole-Hamilton said: “Everyone, including those SNP backbenchers otherwise engaged today, knows this First Minister’s relaunch has been utterly torpedoed.

“And while he is focused on the turmoil within his own party, NHS waiting time targets are still being missed, more ferries are breaking down and record amounts of sewage are being dumped into Scotland’s rivers.

“This is a government in total paralysis and for those reasonable-minded people finally rethinking their support for the SNP, there is an alternative. Scottish Liberal Democrats will be part of the change that is coming...

“When he was Health Secretary Humza Yousaf personally promised to clear the atrocious mental health waiting lists by March 2023. That came and went and it was an utter failure. So how many more years will it be before people are treated on time?”