

6 January 2021

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport
House of Commons
London
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Dear Secretary of State

We write as a cross party group of Council Leaders in West Yorkshire together with our Transport Committee Chair to seek your urgent assurance that the Government will work closely with our region to support the recovery of a healthy bus service essential to rebuild our economy following the pandemic.

Our region does not have a tram or light rail service. Our bus service is the main form of public transport connecting people and communities across West Yorkshire with work, education, and leisure. In normal times three million journeys are made by bus to and from work every week. We do have future ambitions for a new West Yorkshire urban transit system, but this will take time to deliver and, to capture its full potential, will need to be integrated with a wider public transport network where buses continue to play a significant role.

Shortly before the pandemic, we agreed a voluntary partnership with bus operators to develop and grow the network together. Throughout the last nine months, we have worked closely with bus operators to provide services for key workers and to support a successful return to school and college in September. We have jointly introduced measures to keep passengers safe, including innovation of our real time information systems to show the occupancy of each bus. We already have a strong MCard multi-operator and modal smart ticketing scheme which we manage through a joint venture with bus and rail operators.

When we are ready to start encouraging passengers back to the bus, we have agreed a new Fare Deal for Under 19s and will launch a daily MCard carnet aimed at returning commuters planning to work part time. At its Transport Committee in November, the Combined Authority agreed a process to strengthen our work with the West Yorkshire Bus Alliance and to develop an Enhanced Bus Partnership and are prepared to establish a recovery partnership as a transition towards this.

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We are ready to meet the challenges of recovering a bus service during 2021, but we need assurance from Government that an effective funding mechanism will be in place which will protect our network during this process. Our bus operators have informed us that, if the recovery funding is insufficient, they will reduce services accordingly. Such action would put not only our bus service in jeopardy, but our region's economic recovery. We have commissioned analysis of the funding gap for bus in our region and would urge an "open book" approach whereby Government, bus operators and the Combined Authority can jointly plan and support the recovery of our bus service.

As a nation, we are very quickly moving into the next stage of the pandemic and the announcement of the National Bus Strategy and funding for 2021/22 cannot come soon enough for us all. We are encouraged by the briefing which Baroness Vere gave to Cllr Blake and the Metro mayors on 16 December, but it is critical we collectively identify sufficient funding to bridge the funding gap. We must also move away from paying bus operators for concessionary journeys that are not being made to a more accountable model where we can demonstrate value for money to our local taxpayers.

We are looking beyond the pandemic and we are hoping the National Bus Strategy and the "The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution" will set out a pathway to a zero-carbon bus service. We have our own ambitious target for our region to be a net-zero carbon economy by 2038 at the latest and are clear that a significant increase in public transport use, cycling and walking is one of the keys to achieving that goal. Our Connectivity Infrastructure Plan will be published shortly which will set out our strategy for buses and our longer-term plans for mass transit. In our recent submission to the Spending Review, we set out proposals to inform the National Bus Strategy, including support for service provision, investing in fleets, and improving performance in the context of a post-COVID environment requiring new financial models.

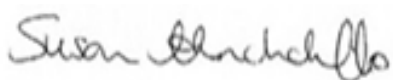
With the right outcomes from the National Bus Strategy, including delegation of the right level of funding, we are well placed to work with our partners to build on our effective joint management of the bus network through the COVID-19 pandemic.

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We would urge Government to move quickly to identify an effective funding and governance model which supports our collective ambitions for bus in 2021/22 and beyond.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe
Chair of West Yorkshire Combined
Authority and Leader of Bradford
Council



Cllr Tim Swift MBE
Deputy Chair, West Yorkshire
Combined Authority and Leader of
Calderdale Council



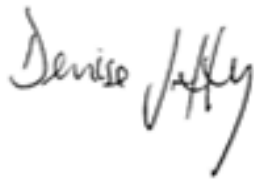
Cllr Kim Groves
Chair of Transport, West Yorkshire Combined Authority



Cllr Judith Blake CBE
Leader of Leeds City Council



Cllr Stewart Golton
Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Leeds City Council



Cllr Denise Jeffery
Leader of Wakefield Council



Cllr Steven Leigh MBE
Leader of Conservative Group, Calderdale Council



Roger Marsh OBE DL
Chair of Leeds City Region LEP and NP11



Cllr Shabir Pandor
Leader of Kirklees Council



Cllr Rebecca Poulsen
Leader of Conservative Group, Bradford Council