



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Our Ref: ZA22067
20 October 2016

Dear Chris,

£173.5 million of Government Funding for Strategic Transport Funding in Leeds

I am writing to you in relation to the funding that has been provided to Leeds City Council for a public transport system, following the decision to reject the previous proposals for a Trolleybus system.

I am very concerned that this money is not going to be spent in the right way and also concerned that the unrealistic timescale laid out by the Department is preventing that from happening.

I was delighted when the Government made the bold but correct decision to say that Leeds could retain the £173.5 million of central Government funding that had been allocated to the ill-fated NGT project. This was exactly the right decision and one that, as the Department knows, I campaigned for. After previous statements that the money was for the NGT project and nothing else, it was very refreshing and hugely positive that the Department changed that view and allowed Leeds to retain the money when the ill-fated NGT scheme was rightly consigned to history.

However this money was clearly allocated so that Leeds could invest in the *right* transport scheme, with NGT having been rightly declared as the wrong one. Yet it seems clear that this is now not going to happen, and that Leeds City Council is not going to propose to invest the £173.5 million on the right mass transit system but instead will be putting forward proposals to you for a series of smaller transport improvements.

This would be a huge mistake as it would waste this single opportunity for Leeds to finally get started with a mass transit scheme and catch up with cities like Manchester, Sheffield and Nottingham.

I make clear that as a Leeds MP I will not support any such proposals made to DfT and will be urging others to do the same.

Please reply to Constituency Office

It was clear, that despite the Council backing the Trolleybus scheme, it never had any real support. It was a system forced upon Leeds following the decision of Alistair Darling, the then Secretary of State, after he cancelled the Supertram proposals. The scheme was chosen as it was the closest to the modern light rail system that the city (Leeds City Council and Metro, later the West Yorkshire Combined Authority) wanted.

It is also vitally important that we are not actually talking about £173.5 million and it is misleading for Leeds City Council to be talking in those terms and suggesting that this therefore is not an adequate sum to spend on an NGT replacement.

In addition to the £173 million provided by the Department for Transport, Leeds City Council and West Yorkshire Combined Authority allocated up to £81 million as the local contribution to the previous Trolleybus scheme. If the Councils were prepared to allocate this sum to the ill-fated NGT scheme, which was the wrong scheme, then they must also be prepared to allocate this sum to the right scheme.

So the actual funding available for the commencement of a mass transit scheme is around £250 million, with further funding potentially available from the private sector.

In addition, pursuing the right mass transit scheme could reduce or do away with the need for a costly and environmentally damaging new road to Leeds Bradford Airport, which could and should be served by a fixed rail line (tram train or heavy rail) so the considerable amount of money suggested for the road could instead also be allocated to the £250 million which would make it up to £325 million – a significant sum that could indeed allow Leeds to start with one line of a mass transit scheme.

There is also the important fact that the Department has previously been committed to the much needed significant improvement of an electrification of the Leeds-Harrogate-York line, so this could be done in conjunction with the development of a mass transit scheme, if this line (as has been suggested by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and previously by Metro) became part of a tram-train/light rail network in the Leeds City Region.

So I and others are baffled as to why, having insisted on a significant local contribution (from both Leeds City Council and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority), now DfT seems not to be asking for any local contribution and rather seems prepared to simply allow Leeds City Council to have this central funding pot and to spend it on anything. Rather than being a sum of money allocated to finally get started with desperately needed mass transit scheme, it now seems to be offered by DfT and accepted by Leeds City Council as a top up transport slush fund rather than a strategic and very significant amount of funding for Leeds to at last start with such a scheme and start to catch up with other cities.