

GREG MULHOLLAND MP
LEEDS NORTH WEST CONSTITUENCY



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Judith Blake
Leader of Leeds City Council
Civic Hall
Calverley Street
Leeds - LS1 1UR

Our Ref: ZA22067

21 October 2016

Dear Judith,

I am writing in relation to transport in Leeds and specifically about my serious concerns about the way Leeds City Council is approaching the £173.5 million allocated for transport in the city by the Department for Transport.

As know, following the correct and excellent decision made by the DfT to back the inspector on the ill-fated NGT scheme, yet allow Leeds to keep the money for the right scheme, I called on 13th May for there to be a transport 'summit' of civic leaders – Leeds MPs and the Leeds, York and North Yorkshire Chamber of Trade and both Leeds City Council and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

Extraordinarily, this has still not happened, whilst there was event that you called a 'summit' it was in fact a forum for groups and residents across Leeds to commence the Council's 'conversation' on transport; there has still been no meeting of civic leaders and no attempt by Leeds City Council to get all MPs and the Chamber of Commerce to discuss and hopefully agree then back the right way to spend the £173.5 million. You have not even told Leeds MPs what your proposals are, six months on. This is extraordinary considering the timescale with coming for proposals for spending this sum and the huge importance of this to our city. This failure to bring civic leaders together, to discuss and agree a proposal shows a profound lack of leadership on transport and shows that Leeds City Council are still not learning lessons from other areas, including Manchester, that have been successful in obtaining funding for mass transit schemes who have campaigned collectively on this with the full involvement of MPs.

It has become clear since then, and including from the email update you sent and from Council documentation, that Leeds City Council are actually actively avoiding doing what is actually needed – which is to come up with the appropriate transformative transport scheme that Leeds so desperately needs and instead is hiding behind this so-called 'conversation' on wider transport issues in the Leeds area. The open ended wider consultation is in real danger of becoming an excuse for not taking the real action we need, when it comes to Leeds transport, which is to ensure we plan and then progress the mass transit system that you yourself agree the city needs.

The fact is that Leeds City Council should continually be engaged in a conversation with local

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residents, communities and their elected representatives (and moreover should be much more prepared to listen to them – I know from Leeds North West actually how long it takes for the Council to do so) but **what we need now is not open ended discussions, we need very simply for the city to discuss and agree on the best transformative modern transport system for the city/city region.**

So whilst the meetings and 'conversation' has been a useful opportunity to engage with people across Leeds, I was frankly amazed and dismayed, with this pressing need and with the £173 million on the table, to see both in the presentation given by Council officers and also in the documentation handed out that it is clear that despite the £173.5 million of funding provided in lieu of NGT that Leeds City Council have no current intention of pursuing a mass transit scheme.

I am further concerned by the email sent from you on 2 August which has given no sense that what we surely should be doing now is to be getting the leaders of the city - Leeds City Council, WYCA, the Leeds MPs and the Chamber of Commerce - together to discuss how we now progress plans for the start of a mass transit network. This update does not provide any reassurances that the money will be utilised to provide a sensible long term integrated transport solution for the City and the wider region.

Whilst of course it is positive to consult with Leeds residents about what particular transport issues they have in their areas and communities, when it comes to a mass transit scheme, which is what we are still no closer to, it is not a long and open ended 'conversation' that we need (and we do not have time for the, considering the fact that we have £173.5 million of central Government funding which is time limited); it is leadership and a plan we can all get behind and make happen.

I am conscious that the Department for Transport have said that Leeds must come forward with proposals and that the Council will therefore be concerned that they need to put forward proposals for spending the money now, before proper consideration has been made about the much needed mass transit scheme (which is why it is frustrating that there has been no progress on this in the last six months). It would be absurd for Leeds to waste this opportunity just because of an arbitrary Government timetable, so I have written to DfT urging them to give time for proper consideration of what Leeds really needs as you yourself have acknowledged, which is a mass transit scheme to run alongside our railways, bus services and cycling and walking routes. I hope you will back this call as will the MPs, rather than submitting a bid that does not deliver what Leeds really needs.

The bid for NGT that was made by Leeds was for a mass transit system and it was made for trolleybus simply system because Leeds disgracefully was not allowed to bid for light rail. So now that this is no longer the case, then surely Leeds can and must progress with the right



system. **We therefore need to ensure that this money is indeed spent on FINALLY getting started mass transit system.**

This is now the opportunity that Leeds has been waiting for. As a city we have been crying out for central Government to allow us to build the most appropriate mass transit system for our city, something that will enable our city to compete with other cities across Europe. This opportunity will not come about again, it is a once in a lifetime opportunity and if we fail to ensure that this money is spent on the right solution you will squander the chance for Leeds to have a mass transit system and to catch up with the likes of Manchester and Sheffield on transport.

I am particularly concerned, as are others I have spoken to, that it seems to be that the Council are intending to spend the £173.5 million on lots of smaller projects. This would be a huge mistake and would consign Leeds to being second best in transport terms to these other cities and would do nothing to do what is urgently needed – which is to get people, especially commuters, out of their cars and onto public transport.

When the DfT announced that NGT would not be proceeding, following the inspector's decision, you said this in the Yorkshire Evening Post on the 24th May:

"We now need to set out a clear, ambitious and realistic 30-year vision and plan for transport in Leeds. It should also set out transformational long-term projects, potentially tram-train, which would enable us provide new stations and more frequent services on existing rail lines, and a route to the airport".

Yet you appear to have since then completely disregarded the 2008/9 Metro proposal for tram train, why is that? Leeds City Council have also in that six months done nothing about coming forward with any other ideas as to how to develop the much needed mass transit/light rail scheme and other ideas of where a first line could be.

Leeds City Council must not fritter this sum away on localised improvements but must ensure it is spent on a mass transit scheme. Realistically we will never again be given such a sum of money - so if Leeds City Council fail to now come up with a plan to spend it on commencing a mass transit scheme we will probably never get a modern, integrated 21st century scheme.

Leeds City Council and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority need to be clear that it isn't just the £173.5 million of Government funding – and that there is more available now. As you know, as well as the £173.5 million from central Government, up to £81 million of funding was allocated from Leeds City Council and the West Yorkshire Transport Authority which should therefore also now be made available **so there is £254 million to spend on a mass transit scheme** (the same money as was allocated to the NGT system if it went ahead – which we can now spend on the right scheme not one forced on us by the DfT!). It would be

absurd for the two authorities to now turn round and claim that they are not prepared to invest the money they were prepared to for the ill-fated NGT scheme that was never what the Council actually wanted. So the Council and West Yorkshire Combined Authority must equally be prepared to spend the £81 million on the right scheme to finally get us started with the mass transit system we have all been campaigning for for so long.

So with this money we can at last – and must - pursue a mass transit scheme for Leeds/the Leeds City Region.

There will be different ways we need to commence with a mass transit scheme and we know that the reasons Leeds still has nothing is because we have never got started whilst other cities have developed their schemes phase by phase. So the £173.5 million **MUST** be allocated to getting started and we need to be discussing the options for this now, not having a wider open ended conversation. We need to consider the latest light rail technology and tram-train (which may be more suitable to cover the Leeds City Region). I have already pointed out that it was the predecessor of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Metro, who in 2009 put forward a very strong proposal for a tram train network to be developed, starting with the Leeds-Harrogate-York line then being developed in phases, linking Leeds with Bradford and the Five Towns. Starting with the Leeds-Harrogate-York line has the very considerable advantage of allowing the short tram-train link to Leeds Bradford Airport to be constructed as the line is converted, which would deliver this important fixed link from Leeds City Centre to the airport, which is only just over a mile from the line. Metro officers (who are still at WYCA) put forward a cost of £17-£25 million for this link in 2009 (obviously separate to the cost of the conversion of the rest of the line).

The airport tram-train link could therefore be done rather than the controversial and expensive road link proposals and the money earmarked for this should instead be rolled into the funding for line one of the new Leeds City Region. This would also mean the £40-£75 million earmarked for airport road link could be added to the pot ***creating a sum of over £300 million simply from what both Councils have already allocated to transport schemes whose aims would be achieved by this proposal.*** This would also avoid the need for a 'parkway station' which would still require passengers to travel to the Airport by bus, when a fixed rail link is clearly preferable and much more likely to encourage travellers to travel to and from the airport. Plus, as you now, there will be money available from the Department for Transport for the electrification of the line, which although delayed, will still have to happen at some stage – and could be delivered at the same time as the introduction of tram-trains running alongside the East Coast service to London.

There are, of course, other potential ways we can develop a light rail scheme in Leeds – that can also be considered alongside the existing (Metro) tram-train proposal (though in any case I strongly believe Leeds must pursue a fixed rail link to Leeds Bradford Airport). I would be



happy to discuss these with you and offer the full support of the All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group that I chair and which several Leeds City Region MPs are also members of.

It is wrongheaded and extremely short-sighted to suggest that because the £173.5 million isn't itself enough to deliver a whole network, that this is not what the money should be spent on. All other cities and systems have been developed in this way, starting with a line or two then expanding in the future. It is also wrongheaded and short-sighted to claim that we shouldn't proceed with any first line because it can only serve one corridor. This completely misses the point that any such line would ease congestion of cars coming into Leeds and secondly would on its own benefit the Leeds economy. So it clearly would benefit the whole city and city region, wherever it is constructed (and of course even more so as it is expanded). So together, we, the Councils, MPs, transport consultants and the business community must come up with is the best way to start a network and where. Doing so will benefit Leeds as a whole by the proven economic benefit of mass transit/light rail schemes and by reducing congestion and improving air quality. Once a first line is in, with the money we have, then other lines will follow.

I make clear that if we can all agree the best light rail scheme with a first line anywhere, I will support this regardless of where it is in the city – but what has been disappointing is that so far no one has added any new proposals to the one put forward by Metro, for tram train on the Leeds-Harrogate-York line (which I remind you, was their proposal, as presented at the time and welcomed in principle by the then Leeds City Council leaders, it is not my proposal or that of the Parliamentary Light Rail Group).

So I urge you to now make clear that Leeds City Council now has the start of a mass transit scheme as a top priority not merely an medium/long term aspiration – and crucially that the Council will spend the £173.5 million on commencing a mass transit scheme.

So many of us in Leeds, including you, have been critical of how central Government of different colours has dictated to Leeds what kind of transport scheme we should or could develop. Now we have the unprecedented situation where we have secured funding (the same amount of funding as the government had said it would provide for NGT) but without the Department for Transport dictating to us what we must spend it on.

This is therefore an unprecedented opportunity but also a unique one that we must grasp and currently I see now sign that either Leeds City Council or the West Yorkshire Combined Authority are doing that.

As recently as 27 February, this year, Cllr Keith Wakefield, WYCA Chair said in the Yorkshire Evening Post:

"It has long been acknowledged that Leeds City Region needs the kind of multi-modal

transport system that you will find in most major European cities. Developing a metro-style system with integrated rail, light rail, bus, cycling and walking networks designed to meet local people's needs, will underpin the economic growth and resulting job creation we are already seeing in the City Region."

So why, with this once in a lifetime opportunity to plan and implement the start of the light rail element of this, wherever that may be, are Leeds City Council (seemingly with the tacit support of the WYCA) intending to squander this opportunity. It will not come around again.

You yourself said in the Yorkshire Evening Post on the 24th May:

"It is deeply frustrating and regrettable that Leeds will remain the largest city in Western Europe without a rapid transit system. The people of the city deserve better".

They do indeed - yet currently Leeds City council seem set to squander this one off opportunity to rectify this unhappy fact that we have all said we want to see change.

I quote from the end of your email dated 2nd August, where you say that the proposal for the £173.5 million must *"support our vision for a transport system in which matches our ambitions for the city"*. Yet it seems clear that Leeds City Council currently lacks ambition and a vision for modern public transport in Leeds and if you propose spending the £173.5 million on a series of small improvements not on a mass transit scheme, then you will have confirmed that. I urge instead that you go back to the ambition we have all shared previously for Leeds and the Leeds City Region – which is to finally progress a mass transit scheme in Leeds.

So I look forward to hearing from you and look forward to meeting to discuss this.

Yours sincerely,



Greg Mulholland MP

Member of Parliament for Leeds North West

cc Leeds MPs

Cllr Andrew Carter, Leader, Conservative Group

Cllr Stewart Golton, Leader, Liberal Democrat Group

Cllr Robert Finnigan, Morley Borough Independents

Cllr David Blackburn, Leader, Green Group

Keith Wakefield, Chair, Transport Committee, West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Gerald Jennings, President, Leeds, York and North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce