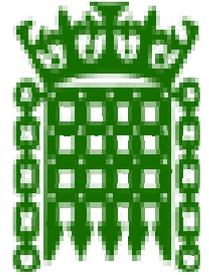




All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group

House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA
Light Rail & Trams, Affordable & Sustainable Transport

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"Government transport millions for Leeds must be used for mass transit scheme and not squandered on smaller measures" says Leeds MP

October 27, 2016 10:41 AM



Leeds North West MP Greg Mulholland has written to Leeds City Council and the Department for Transport demanding that the £173.5 million, allocated for the now-defunct Next Generation Transport (NGT) scheme, is actually used for a mass transit scheme for Leeds and not squandered on smaller scale improvements, which seems to be what Leeds City Council are going to propose.

Greg has also criticised the council for a "profound lack of leadership" over this vitally important issue and warned that they are in danger of wasting this one-off opportunity to finally secure a mass transit system for Leeds.

It is clear that Leeds City Council have refused to plan for a mass transit scheme despite claiming to support one and have failed to bring together civic leaders to back such a plan.

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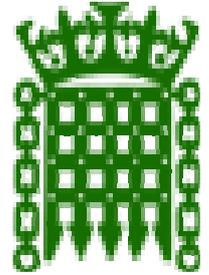
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After the Department turned down the NGT scheme but said Leeds could retain and spend the money on the right scheme, Greg called for a transport summit of Leeds MPs and council and business leaders to discuss such a scheme, but the Council never organised such a meeting - meaning that Leeds civic leaders including MPs were never given the chance to agree and back such a plan.

Despite the fact that the Council and Metro/the West Yorkshire Combined Authority have consistently agreed that Leeds needs a new mass transit scheme, using light rail or tram train, they seem set to instead bid for a series of smaller changes and by so doing would squander this one-off opportunity to finally secure funding to start a mass transit scheme. Greg is arguing that we must now plan for a mass transit scheme using a form of light rail and decide where to build the first line and then plan to expand the network in the future.

Only in May, Cllr Judith Blake, Leader of Leeds City Council, said, *"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"*.

Yet it seems clear that despite this, Leeds City Council are instead preparing to submit a bid for a number of "smaller improvements". Greg has written to Leeds City Council Leader Cllr Judith Blake challenging this and urging the Council not to waste this opportunity and to commit to allocating this money to getting started at last with the mass transit scheme all civic leaders have agreed Leeds needs. With NGT scrapped and Leeds now allocated the funds for transport projects of its own choosing, Greg has called it "a once in a lifetime opportunity" for Leeds to now develop a transport system that will enable the city to compete with other European cities.

Greg has also pointed out that for some reason Leeds City Council seem to now be seeking to obtain and spend the £173.5 million without the long proposed local contribution. The actual funding available is around £250 million, with £81 million allocated by Leeds City Council and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority for the failed NGT scheme. So Greg has pointed out that this £250 million must now be used to finally get started with of a mass transit scheme and must not be used a top-up transport fund for the council and frittered away on a number of small scale measures as there will realistically never again be this amount of funding from central government.

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He goes on to highlight that, with the additional £81 million allocated by the council and combined authority for the NGT scheme, and also the £40-75 million allocated for the proposed road link to the airport, the total size of the pot swells to over £300 million to get started with a mass transit scheme, which means planning for a network but starting with one line connecting with the city centre, with more to follow - exactly as other cities have done.

Greg has written to Chris Grayling MP, Secretary of State for Transport, urging the Department for Transport to Make clear that the money allocated by government is for a large, strategic scheme, rather than a series of smaller projects and has also demanded that they give Leeds further time to come up with proposals for the best way to start a mass transit scheme. At the moment, the fear is that the Government will withdraw the funding

Greg has also called on the DfT to work with the Councils and now convene a task force of transport experts to work out the best possible way to get started with a mass transit scheme for Leeds given the funds available.

Greg Mulholland also raised this on the floor of the House today (Thursday 27th October) and said whilst it was right that the Government had said Leeds could keep the £173.5 million for the NGT, that this money should not be allowed to be wasted - and should be spent on getting started with a light rail scheme.

Commenting, Greg said:

"Leeds has a one-off opportunity and £250 million of funding on the table to finally get started with the mass transit scheme civic leaders agree we need, yet Leeds City council seem intent instead on squandering this opportunity by spending the Department for Transport funds on non-strategic small scale improvements. This must not be allowed to happen. We must now plan for a mass transit scheme using a form of light rail and decide where to build the first line and then plan to expand the network in the future

"Leeds has been allocated £173.5 million of central Government funding to finally catch up with other core cities and yet Leeds council leaders who claim they want this to happen are showing a profound lack of leadership by failing to propose a mass transit scheme and getting all Leeds civic leaders to back it.

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"No one really ever wanted the ill-fated trolleybus scheme, Leeds City Council and Metro, now the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, always really wanted Leeds to have a light rail scheme, but Alistair Darling forbade Leeds from having one. Now Leeds is thankfully no longer forced to have the trolleybus or nothing, we must take this one-off opportunity to finally get started with a light rail scheme of some sort. All other cities have started with one line, so we now need to plan and agree this, wherever it is in the city. We will not get this money or this opportunity again, so it would frankly be unforgivable for Leeds City Council to waste it as they seem to be on the verge of doing so.

"Leeds also needs more time to come up with the right way to spend the £250 of central and local funding and to get people behind this. We face the absurd situation where Leeds City Council seem intent on bidding for small scale improvements just to avoid losing the central funding, so the Department for Transport must give Leeds more time to come up with the right and truly strategic proposals. So I have asked for the deadline to be extended so at last, we properly plan and improvements the mass transit scheme Leeds has been calling for years.

"We now need to see real leadership and vision from both Leeds City Council and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority to make this happen. This is the only way we will be able to compete with the likes of Manchester and Sheffield which already have their own such schemes and other UK and European cities.

Only in May Leader of Leeds City Council, Cllr Judith Blake said, *"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"*. I couldn't agree more with that, so people in Leeds to know why on earth she and the Council are planning to squander the million given to Leeds on small improvements, not planning for the mass transit scheme Leeds needs. That isn't good enough and I will continue to push for leadership and for this one off opportunity to be grasped with both hands".

Greg's letters to the Department of Transport and Leeds City Council are below:

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