



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.



Leeds remains the largest city in Europe without light rail/underground which is something that must be resolved and this funding needs to be used as part of this process.

I quote from letter from Graham Pendlebury, Director, Local Transport to the West Yorkshire Combined Authority who said:

"The £173.5 m has been retained for Leeds because of the well-rehearsed and long standing need for significant public transport improvements in the city, particularly in the absence of a rapid transit system along the lines previously agreed".

This is absolutely true, however he goes on to say:

"This does not have to be a like for like alternative to the NGT scheme, a programme of smaller coordinated interventions may deliver change in a more realistic and publicly acceptable way"

This second sentence is frankly contradictory to the first. With overcapacity on all local railways and at Leeds City Station, we do indeed need a rapid/mass transit scheme and an additional form of transport. It does not have to be "like for like" whatever that actually means, i.e. it does not have to follow the same routes, but Leeds clearly *does* need a mass transit system and we need to plan and implement one now. I have to say that "may deliver change" is a quite an extraordinary statement to include in such a letter. On what evidential basis is the Department suggesting that "a programme of smaller coordinated interventions" can deliver strategic change? I do not believe the DfT have any basis for saying this and the use of the word "may" is worrying. We need solutions that WILL at least deliver the strategic transformation that Leeds so desperately needs.

I am at a loss how the West Yorkshire Combined Authority can possibly endorse small transport improvements in the Leeds City Council area and not continue to call (as they have consistently) for a strategic mass transit project that will benefit the whole Leeds City Region and its economy. The concern expressed by some in West Yorkshire is that the reason they are doing this is because the WYCA is chaired by the former Leader of Leeds City Council, Cllr Keith Wakefield.

So I must urge you, the DfT, to agree that what should happen in Leeds is not for this crucial pot of money to be squandered on a series of non strategic smaller transport improvements and that it must instead be put towards starting a full mass transit system that provides the catalyst for further progress, providing the funding for the first identified line and agreeing the technology, and finally after decades of failure on transport, getting started with the right such scheme. With central Government funding being limited and rightly being allocated only to projects that have proven strategic and economic benefit.

This funding must not be used to top up the budget for Leeds City Council's Highways

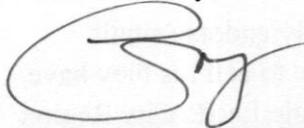
Department and its transport budget. It was given for a transformative additional mode of transport and must be spent on such a solution, and this alone. Failure to ensure this will mean that this huge opportunity for Leeds, provided by the Department for Transport, will be wasted, and the City will never have the opportunity again to catch up with Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham, Birmingham etc., in terms of transport, resulting in continued congestion and pollution problems which will get worse.

So I urge you to do three things:

1. Announce that the deadline for the submission and allocation of this money is being relaxed to allow the necessary time for Leeds to develop a proposal to use this money for the start of a mass transit scheme.
2. To make clear to both Leeds City Council and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority that this money was given to Leeds to be spent on the right strategic scheme, which therefore means they must work up plans now for the start of a mass transit scheme – which £250 million could deliver the start of.
3. To convene a task force of mass transit experts (from the UK and from the Leeds City region) to work on what the best mass transit scheme would be for the Leeds City Region and where the initial mileage could be invested with the £250 available.

I clearly require a response to this letter before any decision is taken by the DfT on any proposals from Leeds. I am copying this letter to Leeds Council leaders and all Leeds MPs and to the Leeds, York and North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce.

Yours sincerely,



Greg Mulholland MP

Member of Parliament for Leeds North West

cc Leeds MPs
Cllr Judith Blake, Leader, Leeds City Council
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