



Department for Transport

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To:
Members of the All-Parliamentary Group
for Left Behind Neighbourhoods and
Campaign for Better Transport

10 June 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for meeting on Tuesday 18 May 2021, to discuss your recent report, 'Connecting communities: improving transport to get 'left behind' neighbourhoods back on track'. I would like to thank both Co-chairs of the APPG for Left Behind Neighbourhoods and colleagues at the Campaign for Better Transport for this thought-provoking discussion which reiterated how important good local bus services are to connecting communities across the country.

As we discussed during our meeting, through our National Bus Strategy for England, we will deliver better bus services for passengers across the country, through ambitious and far-reaching reform of how services are planned and delivered. As you note in your report, and our strategy also acknowledges, good connectivity is crucial to wider priorities, enabling people to access work and opportunity, and strengthening communities. Better buses will make a significant contribution to levelling-up.

Collaboration between local transport authorities (LTAs) and their local bus operators will be at the heart of successful delivery of the bus strategy. By April 2022, we want every LTA and bus operator in England to be in statutory Enhanced Partnership or franchising arrangements, using existing powers in the Bus Services Act 2017. LTAs have also been asked to produce robust and ambitious Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs) by October 2021, detailing how they propose to use their powers to improve services. These arrangements must deliver more comprehensive bus services, including those which are socially or economically necessary; we will issue new guidance on the meaning of "socially necessary" in this context, and will set clear expectations of what we want to see.

When we met, we discussed the importance of supporting local authorities and strengthening their ability to deliver for local transport needs, as your report recommends. On Monday 17 May, the Department published detailed guidance to all LTAs on collaborating with their local bus operators and preparing a BSIP, and we are also working on updating existing guidance on Enhanced Partnerships and franchising. We are also providing £25 million in 2021/22 to support LTAs with BSIP, partnership and franchising

development, and to establish a Bus Centre of Excellence. An initial £100k from the £25 million has already been paid to all LTAs as capacity support.

Alongside the publication of the National Bus Strategy, the Department also announced 17 successful Rural Mobility Fund bids which have now received a share of £20 million funding, to be used to either trial new on-demand public transport services or improve existing services. Demand responsive transport has the potential to transform the local transport offer in areas where demand is more dispersed, and the distances involved make it more challenging to maintain or provide services which meet residents' diverse needs.

In January 2020 the Government announced £500 million for the Restoring Your Railway Fund to deliver its manifesto commitment and start reopening lines and stations, reconnecting smaller communities, regenerating local economies and improving access to jobs, homes and education. Regular passenger services are set to be restored for the first time in almost 50 years by the end of 2021 on the Dartmoor Line between Exeter and Okehampton in Devon, thanks to £40 million of investment. £34 million has been pledged to rapidly progress plans to reopen the Northumberland line, which closed to passengers in 1964 as part of the Beeching cuts. The Government has also announced £100,000 of funding for a feasibility study on reinstating the Fleetwood-Poulton line.

Over the first two rounds of the Restoring Your Railway Ideas Fund, aimed at early-stage proposals, twenty-five promising schemes have been awarded up to £50,000 in development funding to help them get to the Strategic Outline Business Case stage. A third and final round closed to new applications in March 2021 and the successful schemes will be announced in the summer.

The Government has also invited all areas across the United Kingdom to apply for investment from the £4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund. The Fund will invest in visible infrastructure that improves everyday life, including upgrading local transport, regenerating town centre and high streets, and investing in cultural and heritage assets. Bids for the first round must be submitted by Friday 18 June. Successful bids of up to £20 million, or by exception up to £50 million for larger transport projects, will need to demonstrate investment or begin delivery on the ground in this financial year.

My officials and I continue to work closely with local transport authorities and the bus industry, as together we aim to deliver our ambitious bus strategy.

*Yours,
Charlotte*

BARONESS VERE OF NORBITON