

18 November 2009

*From the Chair of the Regeneration and Transport Board
Councillor David Sparks*

Lord Adonis
Secretary of State
Department for Transport

22nd October 2009

Dear Secretary of State,

Protecting investment in transport and delivering commitment to additional railway carriages

I am writing to raise councils concerns about transport spending plans and to express councils' willingness to work with you to pursue our shared interest in making the case for investment in transport. This will be more important than ever as we move into a period of constrained public spending. We believe there is a strong case for investing in transport as a key facilitator for economic recovery and growth, for improving levels of social inclusion and access to jobs, services, education and skills. In our view, transport has not received enough emphasis within the overall pattern of public spending: that case still stands, even within a tighter overall envelope. We are keen to work with you to make that case in discussions on future spending priorities.

We understand that £350 million of the Department for Transport's 2009-10 capital budget has been transferred to the department of Communities and Local Government to part-fund the Government's Britain's Future Housing Pledge. We appreciate that in the current economic climate, difficult decisions about funding priorities will need to be made, but Councils would like to help ensure that the DfT's budget is not seen as a resource that can be raided to fund initiatives elsewhere in other departments.

We would also urge you to ensure that in reprioritisation of remaining funding, investment to deal with congested and overcrowded parts of the rail network continues. Councils are very concerned about the scale back of the commitment to deliver additional capacity.

Numbers of rail passengers have increased significantly in recent years, up 40 % in the last decade, and despite the economic recession are continuing to grow in many areas of the country. Investment in additional capacity for these rail networks has not kept pace, leading to significant overcrowding, resulting in delays, long waiting times

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and uncomfortable travelling conditions for the public. If not dealt with, congestion will have a knock on effect that will undermine economic recovery and delay growth.

In 2007, *Delivering a Sustainable Railway* highlighted the importance of reversing decades of under investment and delivering a modern sustainable railway that delivered better outcomes in terms of capacity, quality of service, value for money and the environment. This additional investment was very welcome and offered an important opportunity to tackle the overcrowding that is a significant problem for our rail networks. Councils were therefore disappointed to learn earlier this year that the Government was scaling back on the promised extra 1,300 carriages to be delivered across the country from 2009 – 2014 and that the HLOS order for 200 additional diesel carriages has been cancelled. The recently announced plans for electrification are very welcome, but will only release a handful of diesel railcars before 2014 and only a few dozen by 2020.

In a statement to the House of Commons on 5th October, you indicated that you will be publishing a new rolling stock plan in autumn to take account of the changed circumstances. I hope you will take this opportunity to ensure that investment in badly needed additional capacity for rail networks is protected to provide a better service for rail passengers and to support local economies.

We are also keen to engage with you on future plans for investment in high-speed rail, and the opportunities it could open up on the existing rail network. We would welcome further discussion on this to ensure that national and local investment plans are fully aligned and can maximise benefits to local economies.

Yours

Cllr David Sparks,
Chairman, LGA Regeneration and Transport Board.