



Department
for Transport

Lilian Greenwood MP
Chair, Transport Select Committee
House of Commons
SW1A 0AA

From the Parliamentary
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Dear Lilian,

Thank you for your letter of 2 May on the subject of non-emergency hospital transport, which we discussed at our meeting on 14 May. The Department has received over 1,000 emails on this topic in recent weeks from Age UK supporters, so I am aware that it is a matter of considerable concern. I also met Age UK a few weeks ago to hear direct from them about their "Painful Journeys" campaign.

As I said at the meeting, I recognise that this is a very important issue, and one where a genuinely cross-Government approach is needed. That is why I was particularly pleased that Sarah Newton announced in the House on 21 May the setting up of a new Inter-Ministerial Group on disability and society. As she said, this will "bring the full force of the Government behind ensuring that every disabled person in our country has the ability to reach their full potential". I will be representing the Department for Transport on that group, which will be chaired by Esther McVey, and I will ensure that the issue of journeys to hospitals is one which it considers at the earliest opportunity.

This Department will continue to work closely with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to consider what we can do to address some of the problems you highlighted in your letter. I was pleased that colleagues from the DHSC were able to join us at the meeting, and I understand that my officials have since had a further meeting with them to consider what we might be able to say on journeys to hospital in the Inclusive Transport Strategy. As I said, we are aiming to publish that strategy in the summer, and I have made clear that I want it to be a bold and ambitious strategy which delivers real improvements for disabled people.

As we discussed, many of the levers here rest with local authorities rather than with central Government, and it is not appropriate that central Government should dictate matters such as the siting of individual bus stops or the details of particular bus routes. We are, however, revising our Inclusive Mobility guidance which gives general advice to local authorities on matters like this. Local authorities are already required under the Public Sector Equality Duty to give due regard to the impacts of their decisions on disabled people. I agree that at times problems can arise because of a lack of coordination between different service providers. Our “total transport” pilots looked at ways of better joining-up the delivery of transport services in different areas, and the Department will be publishing the results of that exercise shortly.

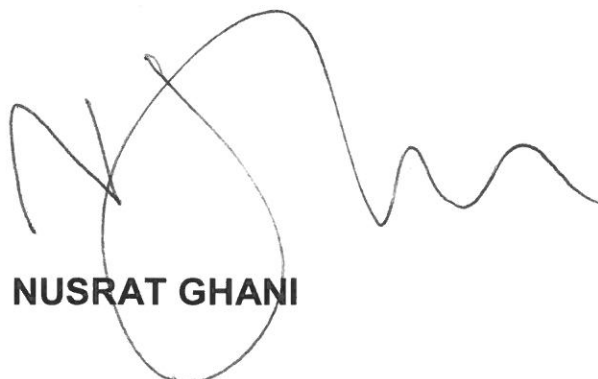
We also briefly discussed the fact that carers are not always able to get a discounted fare when accompanying someone to a hospital appointment. At the meeting I said that I thought about only 30% of local authorities offered a discount to carers: in fact I am pleased to say that 54 (61%) of the 89 travel concession authorities in England outside London offer some form of concession for companions to disabled people.

On the question of Local Transport Plans and whether they could ensure bus routes go via local hospitals wherever possible, I will consider whether the Department might write to highway authorities to ask them to consider this when developing the next iteration of their local transport plans. I suggested that you, Sarah Wollaston and others might want to write to local authorities and local health providers to make the case for this to them directly as well.

Finally, I agree that community transport can play an important role in this area. As I said, Jesse Norman will be announcing next steps following the outcome of the recent consultation in due course. We strongly believe that community transport operators provide vital services that link people and communities to services including hospital appointments, and we want to see this continue.

I am copying this letter to the co-signatories of the open letter, including Age UK.

Yours sincerely,



NUSRAT GHANI