Dear Lilian Greenwood MP
Chair of the Transport Select Committee
House of Commons

Responses to Transport Select Committee

I refer to your letter of 15 January 2019 and apologise for the delay in response. It was a pleasure to host the session in Liverpool and I’m very pleased you found our staff so helpful.

You offered us the opportunity to respond to the local issues raised at the Committee and, if we are not too late, our responses to these points are as below.

Cross boundary and services to hospitals

The Bus Network Reviews, led by Merseytravel, that have taken place over the past two years will, in future, take place on a rolling 3-year cycle, specifically examining access to healthcare, including hospitals and GP surgeries. The scope of these reviews would include access to healthcare cross boundary, where these types of journeys are taking place, and dialogue with neighbouring local authorities would form part of these considerations.

Big Bus Conversation

Later in March, we will be launching the second phase of the Conversation which will largely be based around face-to-face interviews rather than the completion of an online survey. However, we felt that an online survey, as part of the mix of feedback gathering, was appropriate.

Commercial bus route withdrawals

The Committee will be aware that the decision to start or stop a bus route rests with the commercial operator. Merseytravel will step into these gaps insofar as the budget allows. Currently, there are areas within Merseyside that we would wish to cover with a supported bus service, but there isn’t the available budget. We have

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not forgotten about these areas though, and will continue to assess options to provide services. Where commercial services are withdrawn by members of the LCR Bus Alliance, a consultation exercise coordinated by Merseytravel takes place, with feedback forming part of the final decision making process. As far as we are aware, the LCR is the only place in the UK to do this as a matter of routine. Merseytravel’s provision of services is based on need, rather than on revenue potential.

Services after 7pm and on Sundays

Although improvements have been made by operators in this area, including the establishment of a 24 hour bus route, we would agree with the sentiment of the comment that a more frequent and wide ranging network should run into the evenings and at weekends. In some cases, Merseytravel provide such services.

Avon Buses

The collapse of Avon Buses was challenging for Merseytravel to deal with and we acted as quickly as possible to mitigate the loss of services. To replace the Avon network on a like-for-like basis was unaffordable for Merseytravel within existing budgets and, as such, some evening and weekend services have not been replaced. These remain our top priority for replacement should budget become available. We cannot compel bus operators to run services on a commercial basis.

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We are unaware of such a report but happy to look into this further, if provided more information.

New Developments

Merseytravel employs a Forward Planning Officer who scrutinises new developments and planning applications and makes the case for transport connectivity within such developments. Such requests are just these and may, unfortunately, be rejected.

Customer Panel

These meetings no longer take place as it was felt attendance at these meetings was not representative of the wider population. As such, it was agreed that representative focus groups would be established and these have replaced the panel. Merseytravel’s Engagement Team carries out a wide range of community and business engagement in respect of transport, and there has been a step change in consultation and communication in respect of service changes across the region.

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Tolls

On behalf of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Merseytravel is responsible for the management, maintenance and safe operation of the Mersey Tunnels which receive no central government financial support and are not part of the national road network. Millions of pounds are spent each year on running and maintaining the tunnels, with these costs rising as they age. We feel a toll on tunnel use is the fairest way of funding this ongoing need. All toll money collected is used to finance the operation and improvement of the tunnels, with the remainder being reinvested into the local transport network.

Efforts to reduce the impact of tolls on residents are ongoing, with fast tag charges for LCR residents reducing by 20p in April 2019 to £1 a crossing. River crossings in Halton are managed by Halton Borough Council under separate arrangements.

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We do not wish to comment on this point, which is a matter of opinion.

I hope that this provides you with a satisfactory response to the queries raised and, once again, I would like to say it was a pleasure to host the session and we would be more than happy to welcome you back.

Yours sincerely

Frank Rogers
Director General
Merseytravel