

Rt Hon Grants Shapps MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Transport  
Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London SW1P 4DR



2<sup>nd</sup> September 2020

Dear Secretary of State

The coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic has had terrible consequences, particularly for people's health and the economy. However, it has also led to societal change, innovation, and a widespread desire to move to better ways of living and working, particularly in transport. You have recognised this and introduced supportive policies.

PACTS welcomes many of these changes, including:

- During lockdown, the quieter, less congested streets, with cleaner air, where people have enjoyed walking and cycling, and reductions in road casualties. We welcome the government support for active travel and for zero emission vehicles.
- A shift to working from home: companies and individuals have found new ways of working efficiently. This has environmental and safety benefits but comes with some economic and social disadvantages.
- An opportunity to redesign the way that rail services are provided and managed, giving a new impetus to the Williams review. The reduction in peak demand may allow long term efficiencies. We welcome the government's financial support for public transport services and your endorsement of continued long-term investment in the sector.

There has not been such an opportunity for radical, positive change in transport in years.

One area, however, stands out as a concern.

The government's previous advice to drive rather than to use public transport, and ongoing public concern about public transport, have led to continued low levels of public transport use. Meanwhile, road traffic has returned to near pre-lockdown levels, despite the economy operating at a lower level of output. The high levels of road traffic work against government objectives, including more active travel, cleaner air and road safety, and reducing congestion and climate change.

The low levels of public transport use have contributed to the absence of people in city centres and undermine the financial basis of the public transport sector. A number of business leaders, politicians, media and others have highlighted public transport as the most critical part of the decision about returning to work.

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We understand that fighting the rise in coronavirus cases was the overriding priority of the government in the first half of the year and that controlling it remains vital. However, now that public transport services are back to near pre-lockdown levels and the government wants people to return to city centres, work, schools, shops, restaurants, etc, we believe that more balanced information about risks is needed. The Government also acknowledges the need to prevent death and harm arising indirectly from coronavirus.

Advice about public transport has changed as risks and services have changed. We believe there is now considerable confusion about current service levels, travel arrangements and risk. Why, for example, is it permissible for passengers to use all the seats on an aircraft but not on a bus or train? While it is encouraging that the vast majority of people who travelled by bus or train in the past week feel safe, of those who did not travel, only about half feel safe – according to recent Passenger Focus surveys.

We believe that a major public transport information campaign is needed. This should compare health risks of public transport with those of travel by road, particularly by car. Deputy Chief Medical Officer Jenny Harries said recently that the risk of being involved in a road accident on the journey to school is higher than the current risk of contracting coronavirus for schoolchildren. This is the kind of assessment that would be helpful more widely.

RSSB has provided a detailed assessment, peer reviewed by the Chief Scientific Adviser's team at Department for Transport and Dstl. This shows that the risk to rail passengers, including from coronavirus, is less than the risk to those who travel by road. If the externalities of car use were included (dangers to other road users, emissions, lack of physical exercise, congestion, etc) the comparison would favour rail even more. It would be helpful to provide more detailed advice for rail staff so they can explain to the public with confidence why travelling by train is safer.

There also needs to be tangible encouragement for the public to return to bus and rail. We support the call from Transport Focus for a "Head out to help out" cut-price fares scheme and scrapping the planned 1.6% January 2021 fares rise.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David G Davies', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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