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for Transport

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Dear Jenny,

Thank you for participating in the debate on the case for a coherent plan to address the failings of the transport system on 25 April. Due to the time limitations of my response, I promised that I would review Hansard and address points you raised in writing.

Firstly, you raised concerns about funding for bus services. The Government is providing the largest public investment in bus services for a generation, having announced more than £4.5 billion to support and improve services since 2020. There are a number of funding streams that exist for buses, however, many of these were set up for a specific purpose. For example, the Government provided £2 billion to the sector through the Covid-19 Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) and the Bus Recovery Grant (BRG), which were set up to support the sector's recovery from the pandemic. Over the longer-term we intend to simplify bus funding streams. The Bus Service Operators Grant remains the main longstanding support mechanism for bus operators, and we intend that it will remain in place once other transitional schemes have fulfilled their objectives.

With Network North, the Prime Minister committed to reallocate the full savings of £36 billion from HS2 to Network North projects and schemes up to 2041, with £19.8 billion for the North, £9.6 billion for the Midlands and £6.5 billion for the rest of the country to better connect our towns and cities across the country.

The Department has made and will make significant progress with rail investments. On 25 March, we confirmed £12 billion of investment (outside of the £36 billion allocated to Network North) to enable Northern Powerhouse Rail to proceed in line with previous plans to better connect Liverpool and Manchester.

Network North includes the expansion of the Northern Powerhouse Rail Core Network to include Sheffield, Bradford, and Hull: The government announced an additional £2 billion (2019 prices) for a new station at Bradford and to facilitate a new rail connection to Manchester via Huddersfield, that could shorten journey times as low as 30 minutes. The Network North announcement also saw an additional £3 billion (2019 prices) to upgrade the railway lines between Hull, Leeds, Sheffield, and Manchester. We have committed to delivering the Midlands Rail Hub in full and increasing investment to £1.75 billion, improving journey times, capacity and frequency of services. All schemes are subject to the development and approval of business cases and will undergo formal governance in line with relevant fiscal and legal duties to ensure they deliver value for money for the taxpayers.

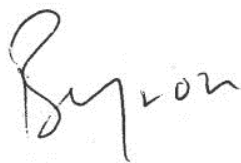
Turning to Smart Motorways, the safety of road users driving on our busy road network is of the utmost importance to the Government and National Highways. Smart motorways are specifically designed not to be completely reliant on roadside technology for safe operation. Nonetheless, National Highways is investing more than £300 million to maintain roadside technology and improve its performance during Road Period 2 (2020-2025).

In their annual safety report published in December 2023, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) confirmed that stopped vehicle detection technology on smart motorways is now meeting performance requirements for detection rate, detection time, and false detection. The ORR will continue to monitor the performance of safety systems on smart motorways closely.

You also raised the important topic of potholes, and suggested that they had become a national topic of conversation because of local government underfunding. The Government agrees that potholes are the bane of motorists' lives and that a long-term plan is needed to tackle them, but does not agree that local highway authorities are underfunded. The Prime Minister's Network North plan, announced last October, included an unprecedented £8.3 billion funding uplift for local highway maintenance over the next decade. The long-term funding certainty that this provides will enable local authorities to plan ahead and deliver transformational change to the condition of their local roads.

With this additional funding come additional responsibilities. The Government is requiring local authorities to publish plans for how they will use the funding in their areas. Virtually all authorities have now published the first of these plans on their websites, allowing the public to see for themselves how the funding is being used. The Government has also made clear that all authorities will need by March 2025 to publish long-term plans for transforming their local roads using the additional funding that is promised over the entire period to 2033/34. These plans will require local authorities to have a coherent long-term plan for the management of their local roads.

A copy of this letter will be deposited in the libraries of the House of Lords and House of Commons.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Davies". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and a trailing flourish.

LORD DAVIES OF GOWER