



Department
for Transport

Sharon Hodgson MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA



From the Minister of State
and Minister for London
Jo Johnson MP

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0300 330 3000
E-Mail: jo.johnson@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

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Dear Sharon,

Thank you for your letter of 20 December 2017 to Chris Grayling, about extending the Tyne and Wear Metro to Washington. I am replying as the Minister responsible for rail.

You may already know that passenger numbers across the country have doubled since the mid-1990s, and the industry has reversed its previous decline, delivering new investment and new trains. With demand growing, we are now focused on resolving the challenges faced by an increasingly congested network so that passengers receive a more reliable and efficient service.

We will be exploring opportunities to restore capacity lost under the Beeching and British Rail cuts of the 1960s and 1970s, where this unlocks housing and growth, eases crowded routes, meets future demand and offers good value for money.

We have set aside significant funding for the development of new railway schemes in 2019 to 2024. Our recent strategic vision publication sets out the sort of schemes that could receive investment. This funding for development of new schemes forms part of the Government's Statement of Funds Available for the railway for Control Period 6, covering the years 2019-2024. This continues funding for the biggest railway modernisation programme since Victorian times and will see around £47.9bn invested. We expect this funding to be used to deliver what passengers and businesses want: a dependable railway, with an increased focus on punctuality and reliability. Any scheme seeking Government funding will need to demonstrate a strong business case put forward by local partners.

The Government is working with local authorities and other partners to identify the best new rail projects that can unlock new housing and economic growth, ease overcrowding, meet future demand and offer good value for money. It is also helping them to identify new ways of designing, financing and funding additional rail capacity. The Government's position is we will consider proposals on a case by case basis, based on the economic benefits put forward by local partners.

Regarding metro extensions, we are aware of the region's longer term ambitions to provide an integrated local system for passengers. We will continue to engage constructively with the local authority and Transport for the North on the development of a business case and in particular how both the capital costs and any additional operating subsidy could be funded.

As announced in the Autumn Budget, the Government will invest £337 million from the National Productivity Investment Fund to replace the Tyne & Wear Metro's nearly 40-year-old rolling stock with modern energy-efficient trains.

*Yours,
Jo*

JO JOHNSON