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**Sharon Hodgson MP**

Suite 1 and 1A,  
Vermont House,  
Concord, Washington,  
Tyne & Wear NE37 2SQ  
Tel. (0191) 417 2000

**hodgsons@parliament.uk**

Steve Berry OBE,  
Head of Light Rail and Innovative Rapid Transit Solutions,  
Department for Transport,  
Zone 2/14,  
Great Minster House,  
33 Horseferry Road, London, SW1P 4DR

13 March 2019

Dear Steve,

I write to you regarding the Department for Transport's Call for Evidence on light rail (and other forms of rapid transit systems), with specific reference to the Tyne and Wear Metro, and the extension to Washington. As you may know, this is something I have campaigned on since I first became an MP in 2005.

My constituents and I are incredibly passionate on this matter. Below I set out our reasonings for calling for the Tyne and Wear Metro to be extended to Washington, which I hope you will take into consideration as part of the call for evidence.

#### **Location**

Washington in my constituency, with a population of 67,000, is the largest conurbation in England without a rail link. As of 2016/17, the Tyne and Wear Metro has an annual ridership of just under 40 million. However, residents in Washington do not benefit directly from it.

Washington is an island amongst its neighbouring cities and towns, with poorer transport infrastructure. Despite being only seven miles apart, Washington to Newcastle centre by bus takes over 35 minutes. Washington to Sunderland, also around seven miles, takes the same amount of time.

As light rail becomes a popular option across the world for more sustainable intra-city and inter-city connectedness, it is important that Washington isn't left behind. An expansion would be a step towards creating a fresh, better connected and prosperous Tyne and Wear as an embellishment to the Northern Powerhouse.



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**Growth of Washington**

Any expansion would naturally bring growth to a town such as Washington. For every commuter, shopper and tourist riding on the Metro, they add an average of £8.50 to the economy for every journey they make, according to a 2018 report by Mott

McDonald. The report also found the Metro plays a "critical role...in sustaining employment in areas which have been subject to decline in traditional industries" and helps to alleviate "deprivation, inequality, and structural unemployment".

Washington saw expansion in the 1960s with its development as a New Town. Unfortunately, the town is made difficult to get around, without access to a car. However, with a new Metro expansion, this quaint idea of a life centred within a suburban, well-designed collection of villages, with an easy connection to the urban city centres of Sunderland and Newcastle, would appeal to many new movers to Tyne and Wear.

More interest in the area would attract more housing development proposals for Washington and our surrounding areas. I believe not only would this welcome in new homebuyers from within the region but also those from outside the region who are looking to settle.

**Employment**

Furthermore, an expansion to Washington would also improve the prosperity of Tyne and Wear as a whole, having a regional workforce readily able and more incentivised to travel further afield to Washington. Connectivity through modes of transport such as light rail can play a key role in promoting higher employment rates, which is something that Washington has struggled with. Lack of connectivity has made many residents feel left behind, or flock to cities further afield, creating a brain drain.

Washington is an industrial town; Nissan and its supply chain offer jobs in their thousands, employing 6,700 workers directly and around 32,000 in the supply chain, most of which are locally based, too. Nissan have committed to investing heavily in the new Juke model and the next-generation Qashqai, as well as continuing with the all-electric Leaf, and I am confident that this will promote more jobs, more opportunities to invest, and more incentives for other businesses to come to the North East. With a more accessible plant and a growing town (in size and economy), Nissan will feel more confident in investing. Growth breeds growth.





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The Tyne and Wear Metro is one of our regional treasures. More services would create more jobs, not only for the residents of Washington but for Metro across Tyne and Wear, and in local railway teaching academies.

### **Education**

I believe Washington would not only develop financially, but also in the field of education.

For school leavers in Washington there is only one local Sixth Form, and one College option; few students travel further afield to Newcastle College, Sunderland College or Gateshead College for post-GCSE studies. The youth life stage ranking for Washington and Sunderland West constituency is ranked 447<sup>th</sup> out of 553 nationally.

A Metro connection would make it easier and more accessible for young people of Washington to attain post-16 education at the many colleges, sixth form centres and training campuses around Tyne and Wear, whilst also attracting more students from the region to enrol at our Sixth Form, or at our Usworth vocational campus of Sunderland College. A Metro expansion would provide students looking to study at Newcastle, Northumbria or Sunderland Universities with more incentives to stay in the town, having an easier commute to their campus, rather than moving out of the area.

### **Environment**

Expanding the Tyne and Wear Metro along the Leamside Line would be a perfect method of harnessing the current momentum behind sustainable living and development.

Currently 70% of constituents of Washington and Sunderland West use private motorised transport to commute to work, compared to an average of 63% across England and Wales. Only 16.5% use public transport. (Constituency Dashboard.) The Metro expansion to Washington is likely to even out this statistic, which will be in line with the Government's commitment to sustainability and decreasing the nation's carbon footprint.

### **Current infrastructure**

Nexus Tyne and Wear Metro released the *Metro Strategy 2030 Report*, which details a proposal for a Metro extension to Washington to connect to either South Hylton station or Sunderland centre and to connect to Pelaw.

These proposals look to re-open the disused Leamside Line rail lines which were mothballed in the 1970s, as well as taking a diversion to Washington centre (The



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Galleries), as *'the existing road network has wide verges originally provided with future road-widening schemes in mind; in the majority of locations there appears to be sufficient space to accommodate Metro tracks.'*

The proposals for expansion identify *'Metro station sites at Washington South, The Galleries, Washington North (Concord) and at Lingey Lane in Wardley. A further site for potential consideration is Penshaw North just south of the Wear crossing, an area of new housing growth.'*

It is suggested that a minimum ridership of more than 3,000 passengers per hour in a direction is necessary to ensure cost-effectiveness. This is achievable should the light rail system be designed as a part of a connected and interlinked transport system. There are two main bus hubs in Washington, namely at the Galleries Shopping Centre and at Concord, linking Washington to the surrounding areas. These are two of the proposed sites for stations.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that Washington could be home to a Park and Ride mechanism. With the easy-access of Washington to conurbations south of Washington from the A1 and the A19, for example Birtley, Chester-Le-Street, Houghton, a park-and-ride system would serve the surrounding areas well. Heworth's park-and-ride has a catchment area of a great size; it has a number of regular users from as far away as Middlesbrough. A park-and-ride at a station in Washington would offer a relief to Heworth and the oft-congested Felling bypass.

*The Metro Strategy 2030* Report forecasts initial demand from these new stations along the proposed route to be 3.954 million passengers per year, and with the total additional demand from the existing network, including the above, is 7.737 million passengers per year. However, demand would grow as opportunities to invest are taken, and as people flock to our area.

Proposals estimate total costs of expansion at £253 million;

- Construction costs £230 million
- Station costs £15 million
- Additional trains £8 million

To open up the Leamside Line, and expand the Tyne and Wear Metro light-rail system to Washington and its almost 70,000 residents, as well as attracting other commuters, would truly bolster the capacity of the North East powerhouse. The future of mobility in





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the North East is an exciting one, with an environment perfectly ready for investment and growth. The expansion of pre-existing light rail technology would provide commuters, residents, and outside users alike the ability to diversify their transportation for work and leisure, as well as allure homebuyers, new movers, businesses and more Government investment into Washington and its surrounding areas.

Light rail should be an opportunity that this Government snaps up in an area which has as much potential as Washington does, despite being left behind so often. The future of Washington can be a prosperous one, with growing investment, upwards social mobility, increasing cultural and leisurely opportunities; an expansion of the Tyne and Wear Metro line to Washington can make this happen.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sharon Hodgson".

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson MP**

Member of Parliament for Washington & Sunderland West Constituency  
Shadow Minister for Public Health

CC. The Rt. Hon. Chris Grayling MP, Secretary of State for Transport