



Department
for Transport

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To: Bus and Light Rail
Operators

2 October 2020

Cc: Directors of Local Transport
Authorities and Children's
Services

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to thank you for all your continued efforts and support, and the role you have played in quickly resolving local transport barriers, to ensure that young people and key workers can safely travel to their places of education and work during these challenging times.

We are strongly encouraged by reports of how well this is going so far and it goes without saying that this would not have been possible had it not been for all the hard work and dedication from local transport operators. As we now approach the winter season your focus will undoubtedly be on firming up planning for the months ahead, which this year has of course become significantly more uncertain due to the increased rate of COVID-19 infections and the impact of local lockdowns and restrictions.

The running of essential transport services to get young people to schools and colleges, and key workers to their COVID-19-secure workplaces safely, remain our top priorities for the winter period. We recognise you will face key challenges on delivering these priorities, such as managing staff absences and ensuring sufficient driver and vehicle capacity on both public and home to school transport, particularly should virus rates continue to rise and as the winter flu season begins.

This winter we can expect that other events could occur alongside our COVID-19 response. This may be winter-weather related issues such as flooding and gritting, which could affect new-Covid related infrastructure such as new priority routes to testing centres. December 31 2020 will also see the end of the EU Exit Transition Period and whilst you may have plans for these individual events, you may need to consider the impacts these will have on your operations if they occur concurrently.

Monitoring and managing staff absences (including workers who are awaiting COVID-19 testing results) is vital to maximising delivery of these priority transport services. We are grateful for your continued data sharing in this area - including on planned and actual absences - to assist our policy development. Please continue to keep your Local Transport Authorities

informed of any issues so they can escalate as appropriate, including on DBS clearances, which are a requirement on home to school transport.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the critical importance of operators collaborating with Local Transport Authorities. Combining expertise on local need ensures that operators and local authorities can optimise services for the public. This is why we have made this collaboration a condition of our emergency bus funding.

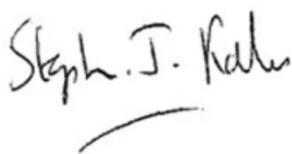
During the winter season, we encourage operators and Local Transport Authorities to specifically work together on the use of alternative available vehicles and drivers, on all transport modes, including coaches, buses, light rail, taxis and private hire vehicles. These additional vehicles could be contingency support for existing school and public transport routes that are already near to, or at full capacity.

To support this approach, the Department for Education's funding for [Home to school transport](#) is continuing into the second half of the autumn term and is available for the purpose of getting children and young people to school and college, whilst social distancing measures reduce capacity on existing public transport services. Although it is possible that the amount distributed to an LTA will change depending on local need, the [Covid-19 Bus Service Support Restart Grant](#) (CBSSG) is also available to support public bus services, while patronage is reduced during the Covid-19 response. However, additional vehicles for dedicated school or college services tendered via this [DfE funding](#) are not eligible to claim CBSSG Restart funding. This is to avoid double funding these services with other public sector support.

We fully appreciate your winter planning will not be an easy process. We are also talking to Local Authorities, the Department for Education and a selection of operators on these matters over the next few weeks to understand these issues in further detail, and to feed into cross-departmental discussions on wider COVID-19 policy.

Thanks to the ongoing support from transport operators and Local Transport Authorities, we have been able to keep people moving throughout this pandemic, and I am confident with your continued operational collaboration, we will continue to do so throughout the winter months.

Yours sincerely,



Stephen Fidler

Director: Local Transport
Department for Transport