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Transport Committee

Oral evidence: Coronavirus: implications for transport, HC 268

Wednesday 24 June 2020

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Members present: Huw Merriman (Chair); Ruth Cadbury; Lilian Greenwood; Simon Jupp; Robert Langan; Chris Loder; Karl McCartney; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith; Sam Tarry.

Questions 317 - 384

Witness

I: Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Secretary of State for Transport, Department for Transport.



Examination of witness

Witness: Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP.

Q317 **Chair:** This is a Transport Select Committee session on coronavirus and the implications for transport. We have one witness with us this morning. I ask our witness to introduce himself.

Grant Shapps: Grant Shapps, Secretary of State for Transport.

Q318 **Chair:** Secretary of State, welcome. Thank you very much for being with us. We will be going through each of the transport sectors to get your views on how things are. We last sat down with you as a Committee two days after lockdown. Indeed, you were the last person to sit with us in the room, so it is fitting that you are back.

I will open the session by asking what your current priorities are. Last time, you talked to us about the aviation sector being one particular area of priority. I am interested in where things are now with you and the Department.

Grant Shapps: First of all, thank you very much for having me back again. Obviously, a lot has happened since we last spoke in person. During that period, dealing with the immediate crisis in front of us was everything. The ability to both not shut down but keep transport running and ensure that it was able to function without the large numbers of passengers normally on the public transport system was an enormous part of the effort. It was a combination of reducing massively the flow of passengers but preventing the system from falling over. When I said shut down, that was the part that was concerning us. It required some pretty quick work with the Treasury and others.

Now, to come to the immediate future, it is all about how we both restart in terms of more people coming on to the public transport system and learn the lessons of what has happened. It is incredibly helpful to stop and reflect on some of what has happened. In some places, potentially we can take these incredibly sad and unfortunate circumstances and none the less use them to the benefit of the overall transport network; for example, by fast-tracking things—because we are in a completely different place from where we were at the beginning of the year—that may not have been possible previously. To give you an indication, that is where I am focused now—to make sure that the restart is as smooth as possible.

Chair: Thank you. We will drill into detail, particularly where there are opportunities to do things differently. We are going to turn, first of all, to local transport and how the lockdown is easing as far as that is concerned.

Q319 **Lilian Greenwood:** Good morning, Secretary of State. Road traffic levels have already increased to 70% of pre-lockdown levels. Are you concerned that there is potential for long-term behavioural change as people avoid public transport and choose to drive instead, and that we might exceed 100% of pre-lockdown traffic levels quickly?



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Grant Shapps: It is an excellent question. We have to be very conscious of that point. After all, we are quite literally signalling to people to avoid public transport, which, as I have been saying through the crisis, must make me the first Transport Secretary in history to actively discourage people from using the system that we have put so much time and attention into building.

One of the options, after walking or cycling, is indeed to drive. Right now, it prevents the overcrowding on the public transport system that we are working so hard to protect. As you rightly say, the projection this week is hovering at around 70% of previous traffic on the roads. It is not an indication that 70% of people are travelling again but rather that there is a transfer from public transport on to the roads, so it must be a concern that we do not end up bedding in long-term changes of the wrong type in that process.

The evidence is mixed. There are some very good indications of change in travel habits of the right types. Cycling has seen a massive increase, but, yes, you are right to focus on this.

Q320 **Lilian Greenwood:** In your recent document “Decarbonising Transport” you set out the vision that public transport and active travel would be the natural first choice for daily activities, and the promise that we will use our cars less. Given that that is going to be harder to achieve, particularly in the short term, in the medium to long term are you thinking of setting targets to halt and reverse traffic growth? Will that be part of the decarbonisation plan?

Grant Shapps: It actually opens up a number of different possibilities, including how fast we can accelerate the take-up of electric vehicles. I always tend to reject the idea that just because roads are being used it is a bad thing. It is a bad thing if it is spewing out nitrogen dioxide or CO₂.

It is not that I have an objection in principle to roads and cars; indeed, we are putting £27 billion into building and improving roads. We just want them to be environmentally friendly at the same time, which means switching to zero carbon at the tailpipe of vehicles. It has an implication there, and it has made us look at driving that forward even faster and harder. For example, we have always run with the sector a Go Ultra Low campaign, which is driving towards being a Drive Zero campaign to focus on zero carbon being the desired outcome.

Q321 **Lilian Greenwood:** When you say we will use our cars less, I very much welcome that, but it is not just about using cleaner greener cars because there are wider issues around congestion—

Grant Shapps: Space.

Q322 **Lilian Greenwood:** —and people’s healthy activity. Will you be setting targets for a reversal in road traffic?

Grant Shapps: No, certainly not in the short term, to be completely candid about it. In the very short term, the most important thing—I do not want to send mixed messages about this—is that we must make sure



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we protect the transport network so that it is used only by those who need to use it and so that we can maintain social distancing, albeit at 1 metre-plus if required. Like others on the Committee, I—

Q323 Lilian Greenwood: But in the slightly longer term?

Grant Shapps: In the slightly longer term, no, I do not have an ideological bent against the car. I think it is fine for people to use cars. However, I think it is inevitably the case, and I am really enthusiastic about it, that car ownership will probably change. People will use car-sharing services more, when we can all sit together. Clever algorithms will mean that an automated car comes to you, picks you up and picks somebody else up on its route to the ultimate destination.

There are lots of things that will change. I really notice them. I have kids at the starting to drive age. One has driven, and one is starting to think about it but is not quite there yet. Their attitude towards wanting to get in a car and start driving is quite different from when I learned to drive, and you may have found the same thing.

There is already a different attitude. That comes about because it is so much easier to have an app and call a taxi or a private hire vehicle than it was, or, as has happened during the lockdown period, to jump on a bike or even an electric-powered bike so that you get some assistance. Of course, there are other forms of transport that were not around when we learned to drive, such as e-scooters. We are starting a year-long trial on them at the end of this month and the beginning of next.

There are more options available. I do not want to see our roads filled up, but I do not want to mix messages, especially speaking where we are today. It is important that people, before they take public transport, walk, cycle and then, I am afraid, still drive for the immediate future.

Q324 Lilian Greenwood: I certainly understand it for the immediate future, but I hope you will not lose the aspiration that we use our cars less, perhaps for certain types of journeys but not others.

The last time you appeared in front of the Committee, I raised a concern about the potential on our quieter roads, as we saw a few weeks ago, for speeding. The RAC has now revealed some truly shocking figures, with two thirds of police forces catching people driving at more than 100 mph. What are you doing to combat the extreme speeding incidents that have taken place on quieter roads during lockdown?

Grant Shapps: I have been very concerned about it. You are absolutely right; you raised it with me, and I have been keeping a very close eye on it. There has been an indication of increased road speeds. That will partly be a statistical thing. There is less traffic on the road and people will end up therefore travelling a bit quicker, though not necessarily breaking the speed limit. Where it breaks the speed limit that is a specific concern. The National Police Chiefs Council has launched a speed enforcement operation to remind motorists about it. Our own Think campaign has been doing the same, to remind motorists about the dangers of speeding.



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I have some better news on that front. The number of people killed and seriously injured dropped by 70% during the lockdown period, so we have seen fewer road deaths. It is early days, but despite traffic picking up again, we have not seen an increase in collisions and incidents. I bring some good news but share your broader concern.

Q325 Lilian Greenwood: That is good news. Is there anything specific you are going to do to try to build on that good news now so that we do not end up back where we were?

Grant Shapps: You will know, as a former Chair of the Transport Select Committee, that we have settled at about 1,700 to 1,800 road deaths a year. That came down over a long period of time—decades actually—and then it sat still for a number of years.

Q326 Lilian Greenwood: It flatlined.

Grant Shapps: Yes, it plateaued. I had a meeting with my own officials, partially on this subject, yesterday, where we were talking about the role of technology in helping to prevent road deaths and serious injuries. For example, it is now becoming common technology that cars will detect a front-end shunt so that they put their own brakes on. Lane adherence on motorways and A roads is becoming common. We were talking about it in the context of future artificial intelligence-oriented cars, which are able to change lanes automatically as well. There is the potential for a machine, frankly, to do it more safely than a human being. It is all those sorts of things.

Technology is one aspect. More immediate though, the Think campaign has been working within the Department to focus on reminding people, particularly on what have been emptier roads, of the importance of not speeding. There is the use of technology elsewhere—for example, the ability of the insurance sector to link lower insurance premiums to safer driving, not breaking speed limits and that sort of thing, through having a black box in your car. It is things like that. All of these things should help us to start to suppress serious injuries and deaths on our roads, and get down below the plateau that we seem to have hit.

I should add, for purposes of accuracy, that we have among the safest roads in the world. This country has a really fabulous—wrong word if somebody has been killed—or notable safety record by comparison with nearly every other country in the world. We are the second or third best, but there is more we can do. If 1,700 people are dying a year—

Lilian Greenwood: That is too many.

Grant Shapps: Absolutely.

Q327 Karl McCartney: I want to come back on the statement you made about cars. I am very pleased to hear that you think people should be able to carry on using their cars to come into work if they commute. The example in Germany was that people were told they could carry on coming into work if they drove rather than use public transport. That was very early on in their lockdown timetable.



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In the future, you mentioned cars and the pollution they provide. Some of us believe that the best form of transport, car-wise, and perhaps the most environmentally friendly, is to keep older cars on the road. You will admit that even electric cars produce pollution, not only in the raw materials and energy used to manufacture them but in the fact that the electricity has to be produced somewhere. At night there is no sunshine, and when it is not windy there is obviously no wind power. In that respect, some of us would say that there still is a place for the combustion engine. In the future, do you think the country can afford to go fully electric, considering that there are some reports that it is costing us £3 billion-plus a year?

Grant Shapps: Yes, I do, to answer your question, Karl. First of all, when I got this job nearly a year ago, I read a lot of conflicting reports—articles mainly—about whether electric cars were energy efficient over their lifetime. You rightly raise the point about the mining of components and the energy required to build the cars, as well as charging the cars. I called for a paper, through my Department, on that. I asked officials to provide me with the detail on it, which I am happy to release to the Committee if that is helpful.

It is the case, and I am satisfied that it is the case, that running an electric car, over the lifetime of the car, is far more environmentally friendly than a petrol or diesel equivalent. That includes the entire life cycle of building the car, maintaining it and everything else.

Your second point refers to the energy that goes into a car. Last year, or maybe in 2018, this country produced over half of its electricity from completely renewable sources. People have a choice in buying their electricity from the grid. Many companies provide only renewable-sourced electricity if you sign up to their particular contract. Often, they are among the most competitive as well, so it is not a price thing. You are right that it is not sunny or windy all the time, but it is often one or the other. There is nuclear power and other sources of power are available.

I am convinced that this country will ultimately be able to get to 100% renewable, or very close to that, in its energy production. I am also very aware, as Secretary of State for Transport, that currently we have a situation where it was always the energy sector that was the most polluting in the economy. That has been overtaken by transport, and I am responsible for transport. It has been overtaken by transport because the energy sector has become half renewable in usage last year. Transport has to play its part. We have to not be the most polluting sector of the economy.

We can get there. I drive an electric car. They are absolutely fantastic. There is no reason why anyone would not, other than the practicalities of charging the things, and making sure they are charged, as you say, Karl, with green energy. That is why even in the lockdown period I announced quite substantial sums, millions, for more charging capability, so that we can help to restart the economy in a much greener way with more people able to drive electric cars, which again, over their life cycle, can be very



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similar in terms of costs because they require so little servicing and have low vehicle excise duty and the rest of it.

Q328 Karl McCartney: I would like to make two points. Maybe you can answer them, Secretary of State. One is that you did not mention batteries at all. I think that is probably something that is hidden away, and people do not want to discuss how environmentally friendly they are in vehicles. Secondly, we must not beat ourselves up about transport being polluting. Yes, it provides, to use a phrase, 12.5% of this country's pollution. A former Transport Minister who came to the Transport Select Committee pre-2017 was going to produce figures, but then never did because of the general election. Over 50% of the pollution in this country is caused by heating systems in properties. We have lots of places where we can tackle pollution, and it is not necessarily just transport.

Grant Shapps: On batteries, if it is okay with you, I will write back to the Committee with the advice that I asked for, and saw, which did the comparison. It would be quite interesting and useful to put it on the record. That showed overall, including mining for the battery and the disposal or reuse of that battery, that it was substantially better.

I am sorry, on internal combustion engine fans, I apologise, but I think that overall its days are likely to be numbered. We have found that there are better ways to propel cars, with thousands fewer moving parts required to move the vehicle by comparison to the old ICE—internal combustion engine—car. I will provide the data so that you can judge for yourselves.

In terms of the figures, I will also check and provide that data as well, Karl. I think I am right in saying that transport equates to nearer 30% of all CO₂. I suspect it is down to how you measure what is transport and what is not.

Q329 Karl McCartney: It is including aviation and the worst of all, which is shipping.

Grant Shapps: Yes, exactly. I am not saying this to be obtuse or to challenge your figures. Let me write back with the best numbers that I can find for the Committee. It would be useful to try to bottom it out.

This is no sacrifice. As my answer to the previous question reported, I am not in any way anti-car. I understand that there is a restriction of space on the roads, but I am building £27 billion more roads and sourcing out junctions and getting connections working. I am not anti-car, but if we are going to drive, let's make it clean. We do not need to be pumping out CO₂ and nitrogen. We can do it a lot better and still get around, as the country and the economy start to move again.

Chair: I think the figure is over 30%, and 70% of that figure is surface transport. Another member wanted to come in on road safety, but we will see if we have time at the end. I am conscious that we have a lot to get through.

Q330 Ruth Cadbury: Secretary of State, you said that, as we recover from



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Covid and the lockdown, the priority for people's transport should be either by car or cycling and walking because of the restrictions on public transport.

The window is going to close very soon in terms of the competition for space on our roads between people walking and cycling and possibly greater numbers of people driving their cars. You have instituted quite a number of initiatives around encouraging people to walk and cycle. Not all of them are in place yet. What can you do now to get the space for walking and cycling in there before the rush back to the car? My understanding is that we are already seeing some hostility among drivers towards the space that has been given over to cycling. Surely that is something you are not happy about.

Grant Shapps: That is an excellent question. On 9 May, at one of the press conferences, I announced £2 billion for cycling and walking, which is by a long way the biggest-ever Government commitment to cycling and walking in a single package. I announced £250 million of that to be spent immediately. We contacted local authorities, in the very short term during the crisis, with £50 million to ask them to do exactly the thing you have just been talking about, which is to get pop-up cycle lanes and widened pavements for walking, particularly to allow for social distancing. We really tried to fire the thing up.

As I mentioned before, we had some success, because we saw an extraordinary 100% increase in the number of people cycling during the week, during the height of the lockdown, and a 200% increase on some weekends. Your question is very wise, because the trick is to keep that going and not just make it, "Remember the lockdown when everyone cycled," and then the bikes went away again. That requires more than just the extraordinarily large sums of money that we are putting into cycling and walking—the £2 billion and the £250 million now; it also requires a change in culture.

I have been working on it on numerous different fronts, in part based on the experience from the Shapps household. Right at the beginning of the lockdown, I went into the garage and hauled out the bikes, which needed a little bit of maintenance first. I stuck them at the front of the house and hoped that they stayed there, which they have. I have seen a complete revolution among the five of us in my family. My wife, who never cycled at all, is cycling every single day. My kids have been cycling. We live 20 miles out of my Welwyn Hatfield constituency. Both of my sons have cycled to London. It has created a different feel. Part of that is accessibility.

I think there are things that we can—

Q331 **Ruth Cadbury:** We all know that. It is how you can maintain the road space that has made cycling safe. It is taking time to roll out the safe space. How can you make sure that it is done quickly? I have a couple of examples as follow-ups. It is about that space.



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Grant Shapps: It was a rather long-winded way of saying what makes people cycle is that, one, it is easy to grab the bike and, two, there is space to cycle. That is your point exactly. I was very pleased to see a number of local authorities immediately reacting to it. In London, very close to Parliament, along Hyde Park and Park Lane, we immediately saw a new cycle lane go in. I have spoken to the Mayor and his deputy about the measures. A number of other local authorities have immediately sprung into action. Sometimes, the technical process means they have to issue TSOs. They have to put a little bit of work in place to do it. We have been working on their being able to speed up the process.

Chair, perhaps it is something I can write back to the Committee on to give you a sense of how successful or otherwise it has been. From the sheer increase in numbers that we have seen, the chances are that it is pretty successful, but there is competition for road space, as you rightly say. We want to make sure that we reprioritise the way that local authorities think about road space so that they think about putting walking and cycling as the first two of those—possibly e-scooters as well since they are coming along—and driving as the next thing, rather than how we just construct it around the car and the other things will have to fit in around vehicles.

Q332 **Ruth Cadbury:** One of the initiatives that you brought in, which was very welcome, was the £50 voucher that people can spend in a bike shop to get their bikes serviced and repaired, if needed. That is still not online yet. Now is the time when it would be really useful.

The other thing is getting people who are nervous or novice cyclists on their bikes. It is not just having the bike and the space; it is also cycle training and Bikeability courses. Would you consider that as well? We have it in London, but I am not sure that is true across the rest of the country.

Grant Shapps: On the Fix your Bike scheme, which was £50 to pull your bike out and get it brought up to spec, I said it would launch by the end of June, and it will launch by the end of June. We have a problem, which I want to alert the Committee to. It is not something that any of us in the room will be able to instantly fix, I am afraid. There is a massive waiting list for everything to do with bikes, including buying them and servicing them. There is a real, genuine shortage, thanks to the explosion in bike use.

Although we are putting £25 million into the bike voucher scheme, and it should ultimately help fix up to half a million bikes, we will not be able to release them all on to the market in one go simply for the fact that there is nowhere near enough capacity in the system. If anyone is an expert in these things and is able to register themselves as a bike repairer—you have to be of a decent standard to do that—now is the time to do it.

Q333 **Ruth Cadbury:** It costs a lot of money to do that course; my son looked at it.



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Grant Shapps: I just wanted to make the point that you need to show a level of competence before you can claim to be a bike fixer; that is right.

There is a general capacity thing, which we are working around. The first few vouchers will go online. I am afraid they will not be open-ended because we need to release them into the system in order to prevent the repair network from being completely overwhelmed.

On your second point about Bikeability, the good news is that just prior to the crisis we announced that we would extend it nationwide. Bikeability, or as some people viewing this might know it, cycling proficiency, was expanded, when I first came in, to cover half of children. We have subsequently announced that it will cover all children so that every child will be able to get access to cycle training. The other thing I would like—

Q334 **Ruth Cadbury:** What about adults?

Grant Shapps: Yes. I was going to say that the other thing I would like to do is extend that to adults as well, who perhaps have not been on a bike for a number of years and feel that that would give them a bit more confidence on the road. It is something I am actively looking to achieve.

Chair: We want to turn to issues around face masks, which are now being worn on public transport.

Q335 **Grahame Morris:** Good morning, Secretary of State. As the Chairman mentioned, I want to ask some specific questions about the relaxation of social distancing guidance, in particular the revised guidance in respect of members of the travelling public wearing face masks. That is now mandatory, according to the Government's advice.

On explaining the new regulations and the challenges we are facing, can I remind you about the evidence that was submitted to the Select Committee by Unite the union and RMT? That was in relation to what they described as an abject failure by Government to protect bus workers in particular. The evidence suggested that there had been a failure at ministerial level to engage. One of the reasons for the large numbers of bus workers in particular who have sadly died as a consequence is the lack of consultation. I would very much like to hear your response to that.

Grant Shapps: First of all, on face coverings, I am pleased to report a very high level of compliance across the transport sector. I used three trains this morning, and I think on the entire journey I saw one person on a platform without a face covering. We must remember that there are people who legitimately, for health reasons, may not be wearing them. Compliance is extraordinarily high, and that is being reported throughout the network. It is a little bit less on rural buses. There is still some work to do there, but generally people have responded very quickly. I am not aware of large numbers of fines. We will have to ask the law enforcers, but it may well be that no fines have been issued. People are just following the advice, as the public have done admirably throughout so much of the crisis. That has been very good.



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You asked specifically about transport workers. That is an area that really concerns me. We have worked well with the unions through this, but I do not agree with the language about abject failure of proper protection. We have followed PHE advice all the way through. I wrote to the transport operators right at the outset and made it clear that there would be no space at all for them to vary from PHE advice. I do not have any specific reports at all, although I would always welcome them, of transport operators failing to follow that strict advice.

Sadly, it is the case that, to my knowledge, 54 transport workers died with Covid. I pay huge respect to each and every one of them. They were doing essential work, although we do not know whether they died as a result of their job; they may have had coronavirus from anywhere. Transport workers are the people who have been getting NHS workers, care workers, essential workers and our food and all the rest of it to the right places at the right times throughout the crisis, without which we, literally, would not have had food on our tables and certainly would not have had the emergency services. They have done a phenomenal job.

I can tell the Committee that I have spoken to the union and others about doing something in the slightly longer term to commemorate transport workers' extraordinary input and effort to assist the country in this time of crisis, with some sort of commemoration or memorial, perhaps even at Victoria Station where Belly Mujinga worked and sadly died. We do not know whether it was connected to that incident, but none the less that might be an appropriate location to remember all transport workers during this crisis.

Q336 Grahame Morris: Thank you for your expression of appreciation for transport workers, particularly those who have sadly died as a result of Covid-19.

Let me push you a little further in respect of the impact of the revised guidance. The guidance is constantly being reviewed. What impact is that likely to have on the travelling public and on transport workers? One of the things I have noticed is that initially the suggestion was that there would be consistency. Some bus operators, for example, are closing front doors to minimise contact between the driver and passengers. Then that seemed to change, and other operators, or the same operators further down the line, were using the front doors. Do we have some degree of consistency? Do we have a formal process of consultation with the transport trade unions to try to ensure that there is some degree of policing and input from the people who are on the frontline?

Grant Shapps: The issue of consistency, Grahame, is something I spent quite a bit of time looking at and thinking about quite carefully. Ideally, as you say and as common sense tells you, what you want to do is introduce a blanket set of guidance for all transport that everyone should follow. That sounds completely logical.

The problem clearly is that every form of transport is different. A London bus can be very different from a bus in my Hertfordshire constituency. In



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your constituency, a train might be very different, where the driver may be in a sealed cab with only them in it, so there is no real point in them wearing a mask or PPE. If you are customer-facing on a platform or in a booth, there may be very good reasons to wear different forms of face coverings or indeed have Perspex screens. The list goes on and on. I found that it was not possible to issue a single overriding instruction like, "You must simply do this because you are in transport." It covers too many different sectors and too many different types of vehicles.

In the end, we issued a number of separate pieces of guidance. To answer your question directly, on each occasion we consulted with both the transport operators and the workers to make sure that what we are doing fits the common-sense solution. We have consulted SAGE advisers and PHE at every step, and will continue to update that advice as well. It is now, of course, for 1 metre-plus guidance as well.

Q337 Lilian Greenwood: I have noticed that at a number of railway stations railway workers are wearing visors rather than face masks. Is that personal protective equipment designed to protect them, rather than the face coverings that passengers are wearing, which are designed to protect others from people who are potentially asymptomatic?

Grant Shapps: Without the specifics, I do not know why it would have happened in the cases you have seen. Generally speaking, Public Health England said that transport workers would not ordinarily be wearing full PPE—not masks, but rather face coverings—but there may be instances where, based on the guidance, it has been judged that they are in such regular contact that perhaps they are unable to maintain what would probably have been the 2-metre rule when you saw it, and therefore they need to take additional steps. There will have been a full health and safety review in the case of each individual location, with each individual operator, and potentially different decisions reached as a result.

Chair: I am conscious that time is marching on. We have a lot of sectors to go through. We will move now to bus.

Q338 Robert Largin: Good morning, Secretary of State. Last week, the Mayor of the West of England told us that they had looked at the reduction from 2 metres to 1 metre for buses, and that it would only lead to an increase in capacity of one extra person. Has your Department done similar assessments, and did they reach the same conclusion?

Grant Shapps: Yes, we have looked at that very extensively. The first thing I want to say to the Committee is that it is often not at all easy to work out exactly what the impact will be. It varies hugely because each different type of transport, each mode of transport, has different seating arrangements and different layouts. It is the case that in some, though limited, cases moving from 2 metres to 1 metre does not fix the whole thing. In other cases, it is quite significant to be able to do 1 metre-plus.

The complexities around it, as we all know, as the science has been studied and developed on coronavirus, is that, if you are back to back, it is a lot safer than face to face. We know that if you are side to side that



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is better than face to face. All of those things, combined with the seating and standing arrangements on different forms of public transport, mean that judgments need to be made about which seats need to be blocked off. It is not the same on a bus running in Newcastle, or on the metro in Newcastle, as on a London bus. That is because they physically run different types of machines.

I have not seen the west midlands example per se, but I anticipated that you might want an estimate of how many more passengers as a percentage you might be able to get on to public transport if you moved from 2 metres to 1 metre-plus. I think the answer is that, if you run 100% of the service, you move from somewhere like 15% to 20% of the service being available at 2 metres to something like 25%, perhaps 30%, at 1 metre-plus, but with lots of caveats to the data. There is a lot of work to be done by a lot of different individual transport operators to drill down into how they organise the seating and standing arrangements on each bus. It is probably a bit too early to know for sure.

Q339 Robert Largan: With that in mind, and if we are only at 25% to 30% capacity, how are we going to continue to support bus operators to be commercially viable? Will subsidies and support continue until all social distancing measures are ended?

Grant Shapps: It is fairly obvious that, if you are not able to run your services with 100% capacity, it is difficult to make those services profitable. Let me just put it on the table and be completely blunt with you. That is the reason why, during the crisis, we had £397 million right at the beginning, on 3 April, that I put in to keep the bus service running in England. On 23 May, I announced another £254 million in support, to help increase services on that occasion. We have, essentially, agreed financial support for bus services that now runs until early August and is reviewed on a four-weekly basis.

I make no bones about it. Of course, it is extremely challenging to run public transport services, including buses, while at the same time I am sending out the message to please try to avoid them unless you have exhausted other options. As a result, you are right, it is going to continue to be challenging.

Q340 Robert Largan: We are starting to ease the lockdown measures. One area of the economy—pubs, restaurants and hospitality—has been incredibly badly hit by the crisis. What sort of thinking are you doing in the Department and in conjunction with local authorities, as we ease lockdown, to moving timetables to give extra support to the night-time economy? Restaurants and pubs, like bus operators, are struggling to be commercially viable. If people cannot get to restaurants and pubs, they are not going to be commercially viable either.

Grant Shapps: Right at the beginning of this session, I was talking about the steps we had to take as we wound down services. I did not really touch on what we have been doing subsequently as services wind up again, but in answer to your question I will.



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I have been very concerned at various dates. On 1 June, we started to see car retail reopen. On 15 June, we saw non-essential retail reopen. Now coming up on 4 July, we will see a further phase three unlock. I want to make sure that we do not end up with pictures of crowded public transport and people being put at risk.

We did a number of different things. I have talked about the messaging and asking people to find other forms. I also pulled in Sir Peter Hendy, who did a couple of the No. 10 press conferences with me, and charged him with getting on top of the situation in order to ensure that we run the right services at the right time, that we plug gaps as soon as they appear and that all the transport operators, the unions and everyone else, respond to the increase in service provision to match people coming back to the service, albeit slowly.

I was having daily meetings with situation reps every day and getting updates. We monitored the situation very closely. I am pleased to say that so far it has worked, but clearly the next challenge will be on 4 July. You mention a very important moment, which is, of course, what happens if people flock back to the hospitality sector. That is something else that we will plug into our calculations.

I suspect it will be a bit like 15 June when we saw people return to shops and then it calmed down. We may find that that happens. Initially, people may come out, or perhaps they won't. The difficulty with these things is that you do not quite know how people will respond, but we will be monitoring it very carefully and trying to do whatever we can to try to resolve problems as quickly as possible if they occur.

Q341 Gavin Newlands: I will be brief, partly because bus travel is of course devolved to the Scottish Government, but I want to raise the threat to the wider bus industry, and thousands of bus manufacturing jobs, as a result of Covid-19, including the 700 workers at Alexander Dennis in Falkirk.

There is an opportunity to help lock in some of the improvements in air quality that we have seen. It could save hundreds or perhaps thousands of jobs if the Government were to expand and bring forward investment in greener buses, and potentially introduce a scrappage scheme. Is that something that your Department is asking for in the run-up to the Chancellor's statement?

Grant Shapps: The bus manufacturers are really important in all of this, to lock in, as you rightly say, the big gains that have been made through less activity. By allowing more activity with cleaner buses, we could still have the same gains, and that is what we need to get to. We need to accelerate the work that the crisis has made inevitable, to bring some good from it.

You may have heard me in this crisis talking about the £50 million we have allocated for the first all-electric bus town. It was announced before the crisis. During the crisis, I announced the 19 towns that have made



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expressions of interest. All-electric bus towns would obviously be fantastic from an air quality point of view.

I can also tell the Committee that I will be following that up with an announcement in the future about going for hydrogen buses and a hydrogen bus town experiment. I think that will be of particular interest to the three major British bus manufacturers, of which Alexander Dennis is one. I think they all have hydrogen bus models in design and in some cases in production. It will be hugely interesting to them and to the wider public that there is the advantage of not being on a bus or stuck behind a bus that is spewing out goodness knows what. It will be a fantastic innovation.

We talked quite a bit about electric before, but I am very keen that we push hydrogen. It could be an all-British manufactured bus.

Q342 Gavin Newlands: That sounds interesting, but is there no wider scrappage system for the whole of the country, as opposed to just the pilot towns?

Grant Shapps: These technologies are quite new, less so with electric, but with hydrogen for sure. To let you into my thinking, I have some concerns with hydrogen that will need to be overcome. For example, as Mr McCartney mentioned, you can produce electricity, but if you produce it dirtily there is no advantage. The same is true with hydrogen. At the moment, very little of our hydrogen is produced in an entirely green fashion. There is that, and there is the distribution of hydrogen that would need to be taken care of and many other factors. It is not an instant, "Yes, we'll just roll this out nationwide." We need to learn lessons from having some pilots first.

I am extremely ambitious on it, to answer your wider question, and I believe that as a country we can do it. I think we can also steal a march on other places in the world by having British bus manufacturers lead the market on hydrogen.

Q343 Chair: To come back to Gavin's point on bus manufacturers, I understand that the entire fleet is required to go electric by 2023. The bus manufacturers are quite unique in this country because double-decker buses do not really appear in other parts of the world. If that manufacturing base goes because it does not have any investment, we may not be able to get that electric bus aim. Why not speed it up? I know it is costly, but it could be the answer to all of those issues.

Grant Shapps: You are absolutely right. We should do everything possible to speed it up, but there are some fundamental economics that we need to deal with.

It is more expensive to create an electric bus. It is more expensive still to create a hydrogen bus at the moment, but part of that is because they are not being created at scale. We do not have clean hydrogen production at scale and so on and so forth. You cannot run before you can walk with these things, but our ambition is not to get to only electric



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buses; it is to get to clean buses. That could be electric or hydrogen, or there could be other forms of energy that have not been broadly thought about yet.

I was reading a paper at the beginning of the lockdown about seven different bus technologies to make buses much greener. There are clearly lots of technologies available. Many of them are more expensive up front, and we need to be able to deal with those things, but we will drive this forward very fast. Of the £5 billion that was announced for cycling, walking and buses, we have yet to allocate £3 billion. To answer your question directly, there is £3 billion of investment in buses yet to come. We think we will be able to buy something like 4,000 new buses as part of that investment and do many other things. We want those buses to use cutting-edge and environmentally friendly technologies.

Chair: That will be a boost for British manufacturers.

Q344 **Chris Loder:** Good morning, Secretary of State. I have a few questions for you about the rail sector. Could you tell us, first of all, are you in discussions with rail operators at the moment to extend the emergency measures agreements beyond September? If so, how long are you looking at for the extension to those agreements?

Grant Shapps: First of all, to remind the Committee, that was one of the very quick decisions that had to be made right at the beginning. Every train operator would have failed in very quick order because of the extraordinary drop in numbers that was mentioned previously. We put in the emergency measures agreements, with a cost of up to £3.5 billion, very early on and kept the system running. That was essential.

You might think why bother to do that if no one was using these things. The answer is that the people using them—NHS and care workers—were providing the absolutely essential services without which we would not have been able to get through the crisis. It was absolutely the right thing to do.

As you say, Chris, the emergency measures agreements exit on 20 September as things currently stand. There is a perfectly legitimate question about what to do next. As you can imagine, we are working very hard on that. As you are very close to the rail industry, you will know that one of the big pieces of work being done was the Keith Williams review.

Q345 **Chris Loder:** Can I stop you there, Secretary of State? I was going to ask you about the Williams review separately, if you don't mind.

Grant Shapps: Sure.

Q346 **Chris Loder:** I would like to get a clear answer from you on whether you are looking at the emergency measures agreements being extended beyond 20 September.

Grant Shapps: Without revealing too much, I was just going to make the point that we were already going to be moving to a different type of railway and different types of contracts. The point I wanted to make is



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that there is now the opportunity to move things along a little bit faster than might otherwise have been the case.

We have these emergency measures and we need to put in place what will replace them or continue from them on 20 September. I cannot tell you exactly what that will be right at this moment, Mr Loder, but I was trying to strongly hint that there is already a changed future.

Q347 **Chris Loder:** So that we are clear, the emergency measures agreements, as we see them today, that are in place between the Department and the rail operators are not, at the moment, expected to be extended in their current form. I think that is what I am getting from you. You are looking at different options. Is that a fair summary?

Grant Shapps: Yes. The fairest summary is that it is too early to know for sure. We are still in June, so those conversations are ongoing, both within Government and with the sector as well. The steer I am trying to give you is that we already knew that the railway had to change. Because of what has happened, we have ended up running all the operations or being the ultimate guarantor of them, as it were. That provides a number of different challenges but also some very significant opportunities to move much faster to a different type of railway.

Q348 **Chris Loder:** You briefly mentioned the Williams review. Are you saying that you are looking to expedite the Williams review and bring it forward at this stage?

Grant Shapps: Not everyone will be as familiar with it as you are, so, to remind the Committee, the Williams review envisages a railway that is brought back together a lot more and has a central guiding mind or, as the media always calls it, a Fat Controller in charge, and you end up not in a situation where the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing; if the bird that hits the overhead line and brings it down is larger than a pheasant it is Network Rail's problem, and if it is smaller it is the train operating company's problem, and all of those weird outcomes. Instead, it will run a system that is a bit more like the way that Transport for London actually contracts other operators to run London Overground lines. They are run as concessions. Most people would not realise that because they look like part of TfL, but London Overground lines are run privately. They are run on the basis of the fare being collected centrally, by TfL in that case, and investment decisions being made by the central organisation. That is basically what Keith Williams proposed.

Winding back to the situation today, we are running the railway and covering the fare deficiency. Clearly, what we need to do is put in place a situation that gets to the Williams world. In some ways, the route between where we were and where we need to get to has been changed and, you might say, speeded up.

Q349 **Chris Loder:** To summarise, from what I have heard you say, Secretary of State, you are looking at expediting the Williams review and there will quite possibly be an interim arrangement between the emergency measures agreements that we have in place and the Williams review



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implementation in due course.

Grant Shapps: Confirmed. I do not mean to make it sound as if, yes, that's it and it's all wrapped up. I am merely trying to describe the situation as it now exists. Things have changed because the crisis has changed that situation. You know what the ultimate goal was. You would not want, from an organisational point of view, to go back to the old situation in order then to have to go past this situation to the new one.

Q350 **Chris Loder:** I do not think any of the rail operators would have existed very long if we did, because of the revenue risk situation. That is fine; thank you.

I want to ask you briefly about the railway system itself. As a system that is mostly turn up and go, it takes a long time to adapt to changes, particularly when it comes to the timetable. You will know I am sure, from recollections of May 2018 and otherwise, that timetable change is sometimes difficult. The industry struggles to adapt to changes in demand.

Are you looking at any innovations at the moment to allow the timetable to be much more responsive to passenger demand, rather than having to wait for that to happen twice a year, and having to give at least nine months' notice to make that change?

Grant Shapps: It is ludicrous that we have a rail system in which it literally takes 50 weeks to update a railway timetable. One of the many things that we have been able to do much quicker during the crisis in so many ways, where the country has had to respond fast by building hospitals, creating ventilators and many other things, is changing timetables much more rapidly. Albeit with a much lower number of passengers, it has been done, broadly speaking, successfully. Most people would not have noticed the work going on. The complexities of changing timetables have remained every bit as complicated, but we have demonstrated that it is possible to make the network work better and knit together faster and better in the way that the timetable, which is an inherently complex thing, is worked out.

I am not steeped in railways as you are, Chris, but it feels to me, as someone looking at this, that it is extraordinary, in the days of powerful computing, algorithms and the science and technology we have now, that it should take 50 weeks to create a timetable. I am absolutely determined to modernise our railways and get them running as you would expect organisations in the 21st century to do. Part of that is simplifying them, which is the conversation we were just having, and all the work that Williams had been doing previously. That will make it much easier because there will be fewer parts trying to do their own things on the same bits of rail.

Q351 **Chris Loder:** As it stands at the moment there is no specific innovation plan to look at it, but you will consider that, maybe as part of the Williams review. Is that what you are saying?



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Grant Shapps: Let me be a bit more candid than that. Extensive work is going on at the moment on all the issues of modernising the railway, including timetables.

Q352 **Chair:** I am conscious of time and I want to move on a little. Let me try to do a few quickfire questions with the Secretary of State. A date for Williams: roughly when would you indicate that?

Grant Shapps: Had it not been for coronavirus we would have released a White Paper already. Coronavirus, as I was just describing to Chris Loder, has changed the picture, because we have now ended up holding the entire network in our hands, as it were. We think that means we can do things more quickly overall, but we will need a bit more time to put those plans in place. Before the end of the year, we will have more to say about the way forward.

Q353 **Chair:** Is that a White Paper before the end of the year?

Grant Shapps: I am not sure which form it will take precisely. The other thing is that a lot of what the White Paper did was to get us in part where we are now. Circumstances have ended up superseding a lot of what Keith was doing.

To inform the Committee, I am working with Keith and meet him every single week at the moment, as well as many others in the sector, in order to work out the best way to accelerate the work. It is not to be taken as things having gone. Unusually coronavirus, in this case, has not pushed things behind. It has potentially speeded things up.

Q354 **Chair:** On ticketing reform, three-day tickets have been talked about, but we will have to wait for Williams. Wouldn't it be a good time to do ticketing reform now, when people are travelling less?

Grant Shapps: Another great frustration, along with 50 weeks to work out a timetable, is why half the people are still walking around with paper tickets when contactless is the way forward and much more flexible and can retrospectively charge you. On the route I take to come here, although I am outside London, I can use a contactless reader machine. It is not an Oyster machine per se, but it works with Oyster at the other end. When I came here today, I was able to touch in with my phone contactlessly and touch out again to come out the barrier at the other end. We should be able to roll these things out much faster.

We are already committed to rolling it out to 200 more stations, particularly in the south-east. There are other schemes around the country, for example in the north, that I want to see accelerated. I am rather frustrated that contactless ticketing has been too slow to take off. I know that people like Transport for the North have been looking at it. You can expect a much greater interest from me as to why it has not rolled out faster and how we can get it there going forward.

Q355 **Chair:** On timetables, the performance of rail operators at the moment is very high. They have slack in the system. Is it arguable that it makes sense not to go back to the 100% timetable we had before and that it is



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much easier to change now because people will not complain as much, let's be frank?

Grant Shapps: When I became Transport Secretary, I said that I just wanted to make the trains run on time. I did not really expect to see that happen by having a fraction of the people using them, but, as you rightly say, the PPMs, which are used to measure five and 10 minutes late and even the on-time figures, are—I happen to know off the top of my head—98%, and 99% of trains running very accurately. It turns out that to do that they are not carrying passengers, which is clearly not sustainable.

I do not think it is an either/or. On Monday, I announced £350 million to upgrade a large section of the east coast main line to digital signalling. Unlike the Victorian system, which meant that if a train was between this signal and that signal you could only judge it in blocks along the line, digital signalling means that in the train cab there is proper reporting and proper information. The people controlling the network can have trains running much closer together but still much more safely and efficiently than before.

Digital signalling and the like are the way forward, I think, rather than not running the full service. We ought to be able to incorporate in a modern railway system much greater efficiencies through technology and through simplification. Although we will have train operating companies going forward, they will be on the concession model that I was talking about before, whereby the thing they are charged with doing is running trains on time for passengers, and not the revenue side, which will be collected centrally, or directly making decisions over investments. They will be charged with a simple, single responsibility: run the trains on time for passengers.

Q356 **Chair:** Will you consider not going back to the full timetable in order to put more slack in the system so that it can run more to time?

Grant Shapps: No, I think we need to get back to the full timetable, to answer that. We need to get back to the full timetable, but we need to make the system run more efficiently. In the longer term, there will be fewer, less fragmented organisations involved, more technology and higher quality and standards, better recovery from incidents and many other things besides.

Q357 **Chris Loder:** Secretary of State, it appears to me that the messaging to the public to avoid trains, and indeed buses for that matter, is crippling the commerciality of services, particularly rural bus services. When will that message change? Have you any mitigations in mind to prevent, in effect, the cutting of services as a result of that?

Grant Shapps: In some ways it is heartbreaking, as a Transport Secretary, to have to advise people not to use public transport, which takes so much time and investment, and great pride in building it up. You are absolutely right about the thrust of your question. It is clearly not competitive, and you cannot make money if you do not have passengers, and here are we saying please try to avoid it.



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We have to be honest with people and say that we want to protect both lives and livelihoods. In doing so, we cannot recommend that people go back to using it until we have the virus absolutely in the right place. We will see on 4 July if we have an uptick.

Chris Loder: If I may, the Prime Minister—

Grant Shapps: To shortcut your question, I cannot give you an answer on timing. That is what I was going to say.

Q358 **Chris Loder:** The Prime Minister made a big announcement yesterday, as I am sure you know. Pubs and other leisure facilities are coming back online. It feels to me somewhat odd that there is no adjustment at all on the advice for transport. Particularly in rural constituencies such as mine and a number of others, we have already seen bus services removed as a result of this, which connected to key hubs and market towns. I am certainly looking for how we can have those services reinstated, and what you and the Government will do to enable that to happen.

Grant Shapps: Specifically, there is a grant called the Covid-19 bus service support grant scheme, or CBSSG restart scheme. It was £254 million and runs through to August. That is designed to get operators in your rural area back to 100% pre-Covid level. There is money going into the system to do exactly the thing you have talked about. If you are not seeing your operators increasing services, the money goes via the local authority, so that might be the first place to contact; otherwise, I would be very keen to know where all my money is going, so let me know.

Chris Loder: I would be very happy to have a conversation with you about that after today because, I am afraid, that is not the case. The money is not going through in some ways as you suggest. I am very happy to take that up with you.

Chair: Let us conclude on rail with Sam Tarry, and then I am going to move on to aviation.

Q359 **Sam Tarry:** I want to pick up on a few of the points that Chris Loder was making. On the issue of the 2-metre rule continuing to be enforced on rail and in trains, a lot of the trade unions have rightly said that they are very concerned about that, and about how it would be implemented in trains, given the loosening yesterday to a metre or just over a metre for a lot of other circumstances.

How do you think that can be implemented on rail, given the proximity in trains? In this day and age, most windows on trains do not open for the circulation of air, so it could mean that we need to stick to a 2-metre rule for passengers travelling on rail. Would that be your view as well, Secretary of State?

Grant Shapps: One thing I notice travelling on public transport is the extent to which it has changed since prior to the lockdown. Everywhere there are 2-metre stickers on the ground reminding people. Everywhere there are one-way systems in place. I talked about Sir Peter Hendy's work in response to Robert Langan. Sir Peter Hendy physically went round



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rail stations and spoke to operators. I charged him with the responsibility of making sure that systems were in place, and also people.

We had very large numbers on 15 June, for example, when we had that stage of the unlock. We had over 3,000 people assisting the public with their journeys, reminding people about the need to remain socially spaced. They were handing out face coverings in some places as well and keeping things orderly. There has been a great reaction to that. I am very grateful to the unions and others for helping that to happen. We are going to increase that with yet more people coming in to do it for 4 July.

To answer your question, broadly speaking, we found that the public have responded very well. We have seen the face coverings. Before I announced it, people were saying, "How do we know people will do it?" We obviously made it an offence not to, and coverage has been terrific.

We look to people's common sense in all these matters. One thing that the travelling public can do is look at the burgeoning number of apps available. For example, there is one by a British Birmingham start-up called Zipabout, which feeds into National Rail inquiries. It enables you to see whether the route you are planning to take is going to be busy when you take it and then to be able to stagger your journey. There are lots of different elements, but working with the unions, the transport organisations and directly with members of the public, passengers, to try to make the best decisions about where and when to travel, is really at the heart of it.

Chair: We are in the last 30 minutes so I ask for briefer answers, if I may, Secretary of State. We will do our best, likewise, with the questions.

Q360 **Simon Jupp:** Good morning, Secretary of State. Thank you very much for appearing in front of us. How are negotiations progressing to agree and introduce travel corridors and air bridges?

Grant Shapps: We will say more about that on 29 June, which is when the current three-week period expires. As I have said before, we want a rational system. There are places where unfortunately coronavirus is currently raging, and sadly in the last couple of days we have seen the biggest single-day increases in coronavirus cases. It is easy to forget that as we see our numbers fall. We want to make sure that we are not reinfected, either by Brits going abroad and coming back or by people coming here from those areas. The quarantine is serving that purpose.

We are also aware that there are areas where the virus is more under control. We are having conversations, and I will be saying more about that on or by 29 June.

Q361 **Simon Jupp:** Many people eagerly await those details on 29 June. Can you give us an inkling of how many countries we could be talking about?

Grant Shapps: Again, I am sorry to disappoint the Committee. I will certainly make sure that the announcements are made to Parliament first, but I cannot go into detail at this moment in time. It is the case that



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conversations are ongoing. There will be an announcement on time by 29 June.

Q362 Simon Jupp: What are the key considerations you consider when agreeing travel corridors with other countries?

Grant Shapps: Clearly, not only what the level of the disease is, but also the trajectory. Those are the complexities. Some countries that might have an apparently lower level may currently be travelling in the other direction. That is one thing.

The other thing is, do they have something equivalent to our NHS test and trace system? The test and trace system is enormous here now. We have the capacity to test far more than immediately required, but that would allow for any uplift anywhere. Does the country we are talking to have that kind of capability? Do they have the testing capability that we have? It was a big story during the crisis, and it is not any more. That is because we have the capacity to easily test 200,000 people—more now, I think—per day. You can get a test on demand if you feel any symptoms at all. Transport workers can have a test now, whether they are asymptomatic or symptomatic, for example. Does the country have that kind of capability?

What are their social distancing rules? Do they have measures in place as strict as ours, and so on and so forth? You can see why there are quite a lot of complexities. I do not want to be evasive, but I do not want to give people false hope, which is why we need to wait until the end of the process on 29 June to give you an indication.

Q363 Simon Jupp: It is unfortunate that these complexities are costly for many businesses. Exeter airport is based in my constituency. I checked its arrivals and departures this morning. There are no scheduled flights today. That is a disaster and is clearly not sustainable. How much of a priority are these travel corridors in your workload?

Grant Shapps: Massive. I entirely understand the pain that aviation is going through. I know that for airports, airlines and ground handlers coronavirus has been a complete disaster. The only thing that would be worse is if the country does not continue the work it is doing on getting on top of it. That is why quarantine was introduced at a point when we were getting on top of it. I know there are a lot of arguments about whether we should have done it at the beginning. No; the chief medical officer told me at the beginning that that would not be a solution from the outset because it would not have done it, as other countries have discovered.

Q364 Simon Jupp: It is extraordinary. We do not have the air bridges; we do not have the travel corridors; plus at the moment, until 29 June, we have these quarantine measures. This is just killing the aviation industry.

Grant Shapps: I entirely understand. Your question was how much of a priority it is. The answer is that it is a massive priority. We absolutely want to get sensible measures in place, but in the meantime I do not



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want to lose sight of the fact that it is very important that we do not throw away the fantastic work that has been done by the whole country in getting this thing under control. We need to do it in a careful and controlled way, which is why we will do it on time by the first review, on 29 June.

Q365 **Simon Jupp:** So 29 June is a big day for us all in the transport world. Are you looking to reduce the quarantine measures as well on 29 June? Could we have the double bubble of good news that we can go abroad with these air bridges and travel corridors, and when we come back we are not then stuck in our houses for two weeks?

Grant Shapps: You are tempting me to go beyond my brief—

Q366 **Simon Jupp:** But what is the brief?

Grant Shapps: Beyond the brief as far as the date and time of the decision is concerned.

First of all, I want to make it clear that I absolutely understand that Exeter and other airports are suffering hugely, as is the whole of aviation. That is because there is a global pandemic that we have to make sure that we are on top of. Secondly, I have said from the outset—I said it in Parliament first of all in answer to a question from the Chair of the Select Committee—that air corridors or, more precisely, international travel corridors, because they include rail from France and ferries from several countries, may well be part of the solution.

I can tell you that we think that is part of the solution today, and I will be saying more about it. The Government will say more about it on 29 June. The whole point of a corridor of any type would be that you did not then have to have a 14-day quarantine if you were part of that corridor. In terms of numbers, locations and the like, I am afraid you will have to be a little bit more patient.

Simon Jupp: I will keep my shorts in the wardrobe.

Q367 **Chair:** Secretary of State, rather than just publishing a list of countries, are you looking more to publish criteria, such as the R rate being below or equal to the UK's? Rather than waiting every three weeks, airlines could dip in and out of quarantine as the risk dictates.

Grant Shapps: As ever, without being evasive, because I do not want to pre-empt the announcement, of course there will be criteria. They have to be scientifically based, as always. We will be setting out full clarification and explanation about how it will operate on 29 June. It is only on Monday, so it is not very far away.

Q368 **Chair:** You will be aware that our Select Committee issued a report on aviation. As well as being critical of the quarantine position, we were particularly critical and concerned about the impact on the aviation sector and indeed on its workforce.

We recognised that redundancies were inevitable, but we took particular issue with British Airways. We could not understand the financial logic.



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On the one hand, they are making large redundancies, with fire and rehire terms for almost all the workforce, yet they are looking to spend €1 billion on a Spanish air carrier. These are changes that they have tried to put in place before.

We believe we have given a voice to the workforce, but ultimately they are looking for action from Government and indeed legislation from Parliament. Is there anything more that can be done, save warm words?

Grant Shapps: First of all, I thought your report was very good. I saw it and I thought it had been well thought through. Secondly, you are absolutely right, following on from the previous conversation, that the aviation sector is suffering extraordinarily tough times. Nothing like this has ever been seen before.

British Airways, although it is independent of Government, must follow the rules and the laws, which are very precise on employee engagement. I spoke on the subject to Willie Walsh, the chief executive of IAG, just before your report. I expressed my concern for 12,000 staff who are awaiting their fate. He made the point, and I think it is a fair point, that it is very important that the unions also get involved in that conversation. There has to be a conversation. You cannot do it without communication. I know that BALPA, the pilots union, has. I know that the other two unions involved have not. I encourage everybody to sit down around the table and talk this through.

Q369 **Chair:** If I can interject, BALPA was willing to engage because it did not have the same fire and rehire terms. All of a sudden, just a couple of weeks ago, they were put in place for BALPA members as well. You can see why there is a lot of scepticism from the unions about getting involved when, effectively, a gun is being held to their members' heads.

Grant Shapps: From a Government point of view, which you rightly asked about, obviously there are serious laws in place that dictate how redundancies have to be considered and put in place. There are protections for the workforce. From a Government point of view, we have had a furlough scheme in place—the Covid-19 job retention scheme—which has been widely used by the aviation sector and British Airways. Of course, if anything can be done to maintain jobs, we absolutely want to see that.

I recognise that the sector is going through the most massive change that it will ever have gone through. This is—

Q370 **Chair:** The challenge seems to be, and Willie Walsh put this to us, that everything he is doing is lawful. On the same basis, it appears that the unions cannot take legal action. There are certain things that he is not able to do in Spain and Ireland with the IAG carriers because it would not be lawful. Therefore, my question is, do we need to tighten up our laws on a very quick basis to stop this abuse? We bring out a job retention scheme that is designed to stop redundancies taking place if parties use it; but this party is using it for over 20,000 of its workforce and making them redundant simultaneously.



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Grant Shapps: My first concern is with the workforce. As I say, it would help if all sides were talking.

To tackle your point about Spain, before we jump to conclusions in the round on this, Spain has suffered from huge youth unemployment over a very long period of time and systemically higher unemployment for a long time. Economists argue about the reasons, but I suspect many would say that the UK approach to employment has been part of what was often called the jobs miracle in the UK. Certainly over the last 10 years, there have been periods where the UK has been producing more jobs than all other EU countries put together. I remember that was a stat at a period of time.

I do not want to rush to the wrong conclusions through this. Employment law is not specifically my area, but I am very concerned about those members of staff at BA. I am very keen, which is why I called Willie Walsh to say as much, to see that they act entirely professionally and go through the proper processes. The proper processes require the unions to be at the table as well, otherwise people will end up, I am afraid, not having had the representation that they absolutely deserve. I encourage all sides to sit down.

Q371 **Chair:** But, to be clear, there will be no direct legislation to intervene. You are applying indirect pressure, but there will not be any direct change. I would like to be clear.

Grant Shapps: This is outside the Transport Secretary's gift, I am afraid, but it is the case that judgments always need to be made about where employment law sits. I was merely making the point that you make an excellent point about what is happening in Spain, but Spain has had systemically higher unemployment for a very long period of time, and some economists will tell you that that is because their employment laws are in a different place.

That may or may not be relevant to this issue right here. All I am saying is that we need to learn the right lessons from these things. The best thing we can possibly do is get the economy going again, and get aviation going again in due course, and call on organisations like British Airways and others to be absolutely responsible in the way they hire staff and treat their staff.

Chair: Hopefully, they will do the right thing.

Q372 **Gavin Newlands:** I have a question about air bridges, Secretary of State. In your considerations, are you taking into account the fact that the Scottish school holiday season starts this Friday and ends on 11 August, when all schools go back? Any air bridges opened at the end of July would rub salt in an already gaping wound for Scottish and Irish airports. Is that something you are considering?

Grant Shapps: Interestingly, on air bridges, there is a devolved Administration aspect. I will be in contact with the Scottish Administration



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before 29 June on that front. Some of these decisions are a bit closer to home as well.

Q373 Gavin Newlands: The Aviation Minister told this Committee five weeks ago that your plans for restarting the sector would be ready in four weeks, so where are they?

Grant Shapps: I am not exactly sure on the timing, but I suspect that the discussions that we were just having about 29 June and that review will be absolutely key to it. In terms of the restart, we have an expert steering group, which I think is probably what the Aviation Minister was referring to, and that expert steering group is constantly working on plans. It is a rolling programme to make sure that things can be safely restarted.

To make no bones about it, quite a lot of it is of course down to the wider restart of the economy and to the quarantine itself. It comes back to the question we were discussing before.

Q374 Gavin Newlands: Notwithstanding those very important issues, we know what the Chancellor said about support for the aviation industry, but, Mr Shapps, you stood in the same hotel ballroom as me and looked the aviation sector in the eye. You said that you and the Chancellor would, essentially, have their backs.

At the start of this, it affected 2,500 employees at Flybe and then 3,000 employees at Virgin; hundreds and perhaps thousands at Heathrow; hundreds more at TUI; thousands at Swissport, Menzies Aviation and other airport service providers; 3,000 at Ryanair; 4,500 at easyJet; 6,000 at Rolls-Royce, including 700 in my constituency; hundreds more at GE, Boeing and Airbus; and 12,000 at British Airways, which we have heard about, with the remaining two thirds being told that they may go back on slashed terms and conditions of up to 60%. Those people do not feel that this Government have had their backs. What are you going to do about it?

Grant Shapps: The Chancellor has put in £330 billion to rescuing or helping to protect the economy. It is the equivalent of 15% of GDP. It is the most extraordinary and massive programme. It probably beats what any other country has done; it is certainly right up there in the world. A large chunk of support has gone to the aviation sector.

I absolutely stand behind what the Chancellor and I said at the beginning of the crisis. Not only have we had furlough schemes that, as discussed, have been used very extensively through the whole of aviation, but there is also support through things like the CBILs and CLBILs—the loan schemes—and, although it is much harder to provide specifics other than those that have been made public, very extensive use of the Bank of England and Treasury scheme called CCFF, which is money that goes in the hundreds of millions, in the billions. It has gone directly to aviation organisations. I completely reject any sense that we have not stood by them.



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However, it is of course right to say that a lot of jobs are on the line; some are at threat and some are being lost. I cannot, and nobody can, deny the reality of a global slump, aviation being both first in and last out by the very nature of its business. The numbers I mentioned are so large that it is hard to take them in, but we have absolutely stood by—

Q375 Gavin Newlands: I am happy to concede the points you are making, but other countries have supported the industry directly. Indeed, you yourself and the Chancellor said there would be sectoral support, which has not been forthcoming. Looking ahead to the Chancellor's statement, will there be help with business rates for the aviation sector and employment cost support beyond October, or are we just writing off hundreds of thousands of jobs in the aviation sector?

Grant Shapps: Again, I had not actually quite reached the end of my list. Over and above all that, which is the point that proves the "We will go over and above" comments we made at the beginning, even when the aviation sector has explored and exhausted all the other options that I just described—I won't relist them—there is then a process known as the Birch process, and that has not been available to every sector in the economy. The bosses of the aviation sector have been able to write to me to show their special case—why they had a viable business beforehand and why they now need additional support. The Birch process, which is not a public process because it is a commercially sensitive issue, enables the aviation sector to get into bespoke arrangements with the Treasury via the DFT on various different potential rescue packages.

It is not going to be possible in all cases to rescue everything, but the help has been invaluable and without it we would not have a number of aviation businesses still in existence, including Scottish-based businesses. I want to make it absolutely clear to the Committee that that initial commitment has been very wholesale.

In other countries, where there have been packages, they typically have not had a furlough scheme, for example, that goes across the economy. They have not had the overarching £330 billion programme that we have had in the UK. That has just been called something specific to aviation. We have had that as well.

Chair: I am sorry, we only have 10 minutes left. Hopefully, we can come back to aviation. We have not even touched on maritime, freight or TfL. We will cover those issues and, hopefully, come back to aviation at the end.

Q376 Greg Smith: Good afternoon, Secretary of State. Clearly we are in a position where, following on from that aviation discussion, there is a massive impact on freight too; 40% of freight goes in the belly hold of passenger aircraft. We are also in the position where road hauliers have now seen the temporary relaxation of rules on them dropped. While it was the right thing to do to suspend MOTs and checks on vehicles, the industry is now looking at a big backlog in getting its vehicles checked and roadworthy.



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As our trade negotiators are out around the world forging the great new trade deals that are going to lead to greater prosperity for our country, can I ask what the Department's thinking is on rebooting freight across air, rail and water and on the road? What steps are you thinking of taking to ensure that we have a vibrant freight sector in the UK?

Grant Shapps: I pay tribute to the freight sector. Other than the immediate rush—when there was actually no shortage—at the beginning of the crisis on toilet rolls, pasta and things, the freight sector has kept food, medicines and many other critical goods in this country flowing. They have been in many ways the unsung heroes of the crisis.

There was a point at which I was significantly concerned about freight by sea, and the supply, and the need to make sure that we, essentially, had what could be described as public service operations continuing to run. At one of the press conferences, I announced what turned out to be £35.2 million to keep a number of different routes running: 13 routes between Britain and mainland Europe, and a number of routes to Northern Ireland. There was a big freight picture.

I have been in close contact throughout with some of the freight sector organisations that run the roads—for example, the Road Haulage Association and others like the TSA—to make sure that we are able to continue to keep freight flowing by road. While 95% of the country's freight comes by sea, you are absolutely right: a significant proportion comes in the belly of aircraft, and because passenger aircraft have not been flying that could have been a problem. I pay huge respect to some of the airlines, which switched to doing more freight flights in passenger aircraft to assist as well.

It has been a tremendous effort. For that reason, we have seen the shelves restocked, and there have been no shortages of medicine or other critical goods. I pay tribute to them for all of that and all the work that has been done.

I set up a transport support unit in the early stage of the crisis. That transport support unit essentially offered transport assets, from planes to trains to vehicles of every different type, including ships, to other Government Departments and anybody who needed help in the coronavirus effort. The transport support unit answered numerous requests with assets in order to deliver medicines and many other things along the way. That again was part of the response.

Q377 **Greg Smith:** Thank you. I absolutely agree with you that all freight operators have been heroes throughout the crisis. The efforts they have put in have been heroic.

Going forward, I would like to see a greater focus on, for example, road hauliers. What assessment was there of the additional risk or the outcomes of relaxing driver hours? Is that something, now that we are out of the European Union, we can look to change to support the sector going forward? What is the thinking around clearing the backlog of vehicle checks, to ensure that small hauliers particularly are not put at a



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competitive disadvantage, to keep supply chains flowing?

Likewise, when it comes to freight in the belly hold of passenger aircraft, if we are going to see more dedicated freight flights rather than a reliance on passenger flights, what impact is that going to have, and how can the Government support the sector around where those planes necessarily land? I doubt the more expensive slots at Heathrow are where they are going to be looking. I am looking for a bit more direction and some thinking from the Department on those issues.

Grant Shapps: On driving hours, you are right that we relaxed the drivers working time directives in a number of different ways. That is coming to an end. I checked in on exactly what had happened.

First, there were no reports of additional accidents, and a safety regime was kept in place so that people were still required to demonstrate that they were capable of driving. I think it was a very helpful part of the response, and, as you rightly say, at the end of the transition period at the end of this year we will make those decisions domestically. Right now, I have spoken to the different Departments involved—Business and Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—and they are not looking for any additional dispensations; nor, in the end, were the couriers or even the supermarkets.

It is nice to know that the flexibility is there. It is nice to know it can be safely done. I do not think we would immediately do it, but we have the flexibility to do it more easily without, as we had to do this time, asking for permission to do it. As ever, we would do that in consultation with the sector, the unions and others, but it worked very smoothly.

On vehicle checks, you will know that we implemented a regime that enabled the vehicle checks to be delayed in order to keep goods flowing. There will now be a backlog, as you rightly say. We are working very carefully with DVSA and others to make sure that that can be brought up to speed.

I have had concerns expressed to me in the past by people like the TSA, on behalf of hauliers, that they are concerned about the ability to get testing. We will watch that very closely. Baroness Vere is the Minister I have charged specifically with that work, so you might want to catch up with her or even have her in the Select Committee at some point for more detail. We are very aware of the issue and we will keep on top of it.

On the wider issue of support for freight in the belly holds of aircraft, as we get aviation up and running again, that will find its natural level. In the meantime, as I said, there has been quite an impressive switch to carrying freight, and quite a degree of flexibility, which I would be predisposed to if others were asking for it on the landing slots-type issue, or timing and that sort of thing. I have not had any direct requests that I am aware of, either from airports or from airlines, but I have seen quite a bit of shift in the type of carriage that airlines have been taking, switching from passengers to belly hold. That has been very welcome. There have



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been many unsung stories in this crisis, and that has been one of them. They have done a phenomenal job.

Chair: I am very conscious of trying to manage your time, Secretary of State. We still have maritime and TfL.

Q378 **Grahame Morris:** I will be brief, so I am going to put all my questions into one. The Committee has been made aware that there are concerns that public funds are being used to subsidise the cost of laying up ships rather than paying for critical freight capacity. I am referring to the Department's critical freight grant scheme.

While you are considering your response to that, Secretary of State, may I point out that P&O Ferries announced plans on 11 May to cut over 1,000 seafarer and port-related jobs? In fact, the consultation closes today. They are making those cuts to UK jobs after taking millions of pounds from the taxpayer through furlough and freight grant support, and paying substantial dividends to their parent company. In many respects, it is actually worse than BA because, apart from making redundancies, they are also exploiting existing legislation that allows them to retain Filipino crew who are paid £4.50 an hour. I would like to know your views on that, Minister, and whether you are going to intervene to support UK jobs in the sector.

Grant Shapps: First of all, on P&O I was very clear when we looked at the maritime freight route support that I talked about before—the £35 million—that I had to be absolutely certain that that money was being used to support those specific routes, in order that they could carry on flowing, and that profits could not be made from the routes, but that the service could be provided, so that we had vital medicines and food brought to the shelves of our supermarkets. It was not in relation to the rest of the operation. I sought, and received, those assurances before granting that money, which went to a number of different organisations.

You are right about job losses at P&O. I think there are 1,100 on the cards. At Stena, there are 150 as well. I am deeply concerned about it. My Maritime Minister has been meeting the trade unions and P&O, on it, and there are also bi-weekly meetings with my officials and the trade unions. I understand that this is an extraordinarily difficult time for a lot of companies and organisations, of which P&O is at the front, but you mentioned, rightly, that it has ownership, through DP World where dividends got paid shortly beforehand. I am clear that they have an absolute duty to their staff to behave correctly. That is why I have assigned both the Minister and my officials to have conversations. When we provided money for freight routes, it was absolutely clear that it was not a part of making money for the company.

Q379 **Grahame Morris:** Do you not think there is a case, Minister, even outside Covid-19, for reviewing the employment terms of seafarers to prevent companies like P&O and some of the others you mentioned from employing seafarers from overseas on far lower rates of pay than UK-based seafarers?



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Grant Shapps: I had a very interesting conversation with my Maritime Minister and with the unions when I popped in prior to Covid. It must have been right at the beginning of the year. The unions were expressing concern over exactly those points. I actually went back and checked specifically whether what was happening adhered to the law, both UK and European. It did, and actually we were bound up in a lot of what happens for international maritime law. It was not within our direct remit, without altering international agreements, but I think we should forever be driving up standards.

I want to draw the Committee's attention to an authorisation that I provided to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency this past weekend to board six different vessels from a company called Global Cruise Lines. There were concerns about the maritime labour convention not being upheld. It was covered to some degree, though not very widely, in the press.

Five of those ships raised significant concerns along the lines of payment and employment agreements not being respected and, critically, the allegation that people were potentially forced to stay on board for more than the 12-month maximum. That involved 936 crew of 34 different nationalities. They were all at British ports. I hope the Committee will realise that I am absolutely unforgiving of any abuse of maritime rights and employee rights. We will act wherever there is cause for concern, which is what happened at the weekend.

Chair: The last section is on TfL. We have the Mayor of London coming in a few weeks' time, so it is important that we cover this part. Sam and Ruth wanted to ask questions. They may have the odd aviation point as well.

Q380 **Sam Tarry:** Minister, I would like to ask you about the conditions of the funding deal for TfL. It included ending free bus travel for under-18s in London, where I think the Mayor of London probably sought clarification from you. I wanted to find out from you whether you think that children and young people should be charged in London, and whether this is just a temporary measure during the Covid crisis that perhaps could be reversed once commuter revenue returns to pre-Covid levels.

To be clear about the impact of it, you are probably aware that the percentage of under-18s in London from black and minority ethnic backgrounds is 60%. That is huge, and we have seen that across the transport industry those people have been disproportionately impacted. In my constituency of Ilford South, which is part of Redbridge, there are 817 under-eights who travel two miles to school, and over 2,000 over-eights travelling more than three miles to school. This throws a big spanner in the works of that particular condition.

I want to know from you whether you agree that this is too much in terms of putting an additional burden on families during what has been one of the worst economic and health crises in modern history. Will you commit to this only being a temporary measure for London?



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Grant Shapps: To put it in context, we provided £1.6 billion to TfL and the Mayor, to rescue TfL. You are right that one of the conditions of that, or one of the things that the Mayor agreed to, subject to the operational planning of it, was the temporary suspension of free travel for under-18s and that that should be part of a wider demand management measure. It is the case that children elsewhere in the country do not receive the same concession but also that any child who is eligible under the 1986 Education Act would still be given free travel. This is not different from what happens elsewhere.

You will appreciate that, as a Government, we are in a situation where we tax the entire country and then have to make decisions about where to spend it. If you are anywhere outside London, you might rightly be asking yourself why these funds should be going to support free travel for children in London but not elsewhere. More to the point, and specifically to answer your question, there is a demand management issue that we have been struggling with in London to try to ensure that there is sufficient space to get key workers on to the transport network in order that they can continue to travel safely. Most of the journeys that children take are very short. Active transport is actively part of the solution.

It is something that in the short term needed to be done for demand management. In the long term, once the finances are resolved, the Mayor runs the system, so the Mayor can make the trade-offs that need to be made.

Q381 **Sam Tarry:** Thank you, Minister. I am very committed to the strategy of levelling up. Andy Burnham has demonstrated that, with political will, you can clearly offer some form of reduced transport fares for young people. I have a particular concern about pupils with special needs. We have over 300 in Redbridge who attend mainstream schools. They may be eligible for travel assistance on grounds of distance, but on the other hand they may not. Is there any way that you could work with the Mayor of London to look at specifics? I believe that is a pattern that would be repeated right across the capital.

Grant Shapps: It may be that under the Education Act 1996 some of your constituents would still qualify, by the sound of things. I certainly commit to work with the Mayor of London.

It is very important, if all the taxpayers are stumping up £1.6 billion to rescue TfL, that the Mayor and TfL are doing everything proper to collect revenues. There had been a four-year fare freeze, which I would love to instigate on the wider network, but, unfortunately, due to inflation, if you do that, the amount of income you have descends in real terms.

I have had to stand up and front up to having to put up fares on the rail network overall. It is not nice to do, but you sometimes have to do these things to keep the amount of money coming in at the same level and not, effectively, descending each year. Because that has not happened for TfL, and because the congestion charge never changed over a period of time, something like £700 million of income was simply never collected. Now



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here we are, asking the wider taxpayer to bail out over £1 billion, in part, although it is not the whole story or even the main part of the story, to make up for revenues that have failed to be collected sooner.

We might not be having this conversation about children's access to TfL had that money been collected. I want to make sure that this is fair for everybody. It should not be that we are going out to the rest of the public and putting up fares, but London does not get that.

Q382 Sam Tarry: Minister, you know full well that it was a decision taken in Whitehall, at the DFT, to abolish the year-on-year grant to London, the best part of £800 million to £900 million. Given that London is such an economic driver, and given the scale of tax receipts it generates across the country, surely that decision has created this pressure in London on the finances.

Grant Shapps: It was before my time, but it is an oversimplification of what I understood happened in the abolition of the grant. It is right that there was a deal that was agreed by all to have a wind-down of the grant that went into the system, but the deal was that the system would, and should, be able to pay for itself. Indeed, I would argue that it would have been able to, if it was doing the responsible thing that I am afraid all of us have had to do in the wider transport network, which is to keep prices up with inflation, otherwise your take shrinks.

I do not really accept that there is a problem with the abolition of grant deal; the problem was not collecting the fares, and I am afraid that stretched out into other areas as well. On buses, for example, during the beginning of the crisis, although it was absolutely right to protect the driver at the front until Perspex screens and other PPE measures were put in place, there was no good reason as far as I could see to put up stickers outside the middle door on buses, which actually had contactless payment for people to pay at the middle door, telling people not to pay for their journey. When you do those things it costs millions of pounds and the wider taxpayer is being asked to pick up the bill. We will certainly be continuing our conversations with the Mayor, but I am afraid it has to be on a realistic basis.

Q383 Ruth Cadbury: Most buses do not have a fare collection point at the middle door, but I will move back to aviation.

We have talked about Government leverage when it comes to jobs. Will the Government use their leverage, when supporting aviation's recovery, to focus on both the local and the global environment? Less noisy and less polluting planes encourage jobs in the aircraft manufacturing sector, reduce the impact of noise on communities next to airports and are good in terms of our global emissions. Will the Government use their leverage in terms of aviation and the environment?

Grant Shapps: At one of the press conferences during the crisis, I announced the Jet Zero Council, which is Government working with industry, environmental groups and others. We have set ourselves the challenge of creating the world's first transatlantic commercial flights at



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zero carbon within our generation. That is absolutely front and centre of our aviation policy.

Before the crisis, I helped launch the aviation sector's goal to get to zero carbon by 2050. That is commendable, but it is very clear to me that that will be made vastly easier by Government playing our part. That is what the Jet Zero Council will do. It will be jointly chaired by myself and the Secretary of State for BEIS. I announced some money for a company called Velocys, which is working on synthetic fuels. We are putting money into all manner of aircraft technology and experimentation.

The first flight is about to take place in what could be the world's first commercial electric aircraft. That is fantastic work going on at Cranfield University. I have been to see that myself, and I made a speech there on this very subject. Meanwhile, Rolls-Royce is producing the world's fastest electric plane, which I think is being worked on at Gloucester at the moment.

Britain has the opportunity to lead in this field. You are entirely right about the ability to create brand-new jobs. Our enthusiasm to do that goes right to the top, with the Prime Minister determined to have Britain take a lead in first cutting and then removing carbon from flights altogether so that in the future it should be possible to fly guilt-free with a lot of new high-tech jobs in its wake.

Q384 Robert Largan: To go back to the conversation you had with Sam Tarry about Transport for London, given that London already has so much better public transport compared with the rest of the country, the figure of £1.6 billion going to TfL is one that does not sit well with a lot of my constituents. Frankly, London commuters do not know that they are born when it comes to how good their transport system is. Given that the problems that TfL faces have, as you said, been partly self-inflicted due to political decisions taken by the Mayor of London, I urge you to do everything you can to protect the wider taxpayer and make certain that we get proper value for money in the deal done with TfL.

Grant Shapps: I think it has to be equitable for all, as I was suggesting. I was egged on slightly by the London bus question. The new Routemasters—the so-called Boris buses—have central payments. I think the desire not to collect revenue was a bit too strong.

It is right that we have balance. It is true that I have had representations from mayors in lots of different locations and from local authorities across the country. It is also true that TfL represents about half of the train passenger usage in the entire country, so it is a very significant part of it. I want to make sure that it runs very smoothly. As a user of both types of systems, I am not sure that everybody would agree with you about it being a great pleasure to be on packed TfL trains ordinarily, before the lockdown, but it is an important part of the system.

You are also right that we need to make this equitable and fair for everybody across the country. There are many areas, particularly rural



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areas, that have been completely left behind, not least by services being run down over the years. I do not make that as a political point; it has happened under all Governments. There were programmes like the Beeching reversals, when Professor Beeching proposed, and Governments followed up, closing literally 5,000 miles of track and 2,300 stations—I think I got that the right way round. A lot of communities never got their mojo back because they were cut off and their stations disappeared.

We are going around reversing that. I went to visit Horden Peterlee station, which is soon due to reopen, reconnecting 70,000 people in the north-east who lost their station, and their communities struggled to recover. Those reversal programmes are really important, as is making sure that the entire network can recover. The Committee absolutely has my undertaking that we will make sure that we adhere to the principle that it needs to be fair for everybody and that we get these systems running for people as, in the medium term, they return to the transport network.

Chair: Minister of State, thank you so much for the evidence you have given us. I am afraid that you will be running late now, but we are very grateful. We pass on our best wishes and thanks to everyone in your team and the Department. We wish them well as they get the country back on track. Thank you.