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Department for Transport

From the Secretary of State
Rt Hon Heidi Alexander MP

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0300 330 3000
E-Mail: heidi.alexander@dft.gov.uk

Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

Ruth Cadbury MP
Chair, Transport Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

29 June 2026

Dear Ruth,

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the wide range of work the Department is currently undertaking at the 17 June session with the Committee.

We agreed to provide additional detail on seven areas raised by the Transport Committee.

National Travel Survey

Firstly, we agreed to share additional information on the National Travel Survey. This survey provides annual statistics on how, why, when and where people travel. It monitors long-term trends in personal travel for residents of England and provides a wide range of metrics covering all modes of transport, purpose of travel, and distance and time spent travelling.

The data allows us to assess the impact of various factors affecting travel, for example, car availability, driving licence holding, and various individual and household characteristics. Recent investment in the survey has allowed the development of new metrics such as multi-modal travel, trip chaining, and travel for residents of Combined Authorities.

The Department is focusing on making sustainable travel the most attractive, convenient and affordable choice for everyday journeys, rather than introducing a national mode shift target. Through Better Connected: A Strategy for Integrated Transport, the Bus Services Act and the Railways Bill, we are making journeys simpler, more accessible and more reliable so that people can more easily make the journeys they need to.

Middle East Diesel Impacts on the Coach Industry

We also committed to share additional information regarding the impact of the Middle East crisis on the coach industry.

As the Committee recognised, coaches provide essential links between many towns, cities, airports and other destinations, with a reach greater than the rail network.

The Department is engaging coach service operators to understand the potential impacts of increased fuel costs on coach services and will continue to monitor the situation closely.

In the interim, to manage the cost of fuel, the Government has extended the 5p Fuel Duty freeze until 31 December 2026, which coach operators will benefit from.

Electric Vehicle Uptake

Thirdly, we committed to provide any further information on the number of first-time EV owners. While we not hold that specific data specifically vehicle licensing statistics show continued growth in the overall EV fleet both in terms of volume and market share.

As of December 2025, there were over 2 million licensed zero emission vehicles in the UK, including 1.74 million zero emission cars, a 35% increase compared to December 2024. As of December 2025, zero emission cars now represent 5.4% of all licensed cars in the UK, up from 4.1% a year earlier.

This growth reflects both new purchases and increasing activity in the second-hand market, helping make EVs accessible to a wider range of consumers and indicating that EV ownership is broadening beyond early adopters.

Proposals for Snow Hill Station Platform

Regarding Snow Hill Station, Network Rail has funding to complete detailed design work, which is already underway. We expect outputs in early 2027, which will inform a decision on delivery funding. We will continue to ensure proposals deliver value for passengers and remain affordable for taxpayers – and we will update the member for Birmingham Northfield when a delivery funding decision has been taken.

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HGV Driver Facilities surrounding the Lower Thames Crossing

We committed to clarify the plans for Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) driver facilities around the Lower Thames Crossing.

Design standards require the spacing of roadside facilities to be considered regionally rather than on a project-specific basis. As such, there is no requirement to include a rest and service area as part of the Lower Thames Crossing scheme.

Early proposals for the Lower Thames Crossing included a rest and service area. However, following a consultation the route was re-assessed and the rest and service area was removed. This ensures the route can be well managed, maintained and considered environmental and local community impacts.

The nearest motorway services to the Lower Thames Crossing on the northern connection will be the Thurrock Services (M25 J30/31) and on the southern connection the Medway Services (M2 J4/5). Both provide HGV parking, fuel, and 24/7 welfare facilities.

Maritime Autonomy Sandbox

We were asked how long the Maritime Autonomy Sandbox is expected to last and agreed to follow up in writing.

We welcome the Committee's interest in this area and are pleased that the Regulating for Growth Bill recognises Maritime Autonomous Surface Shipping (MASS) as a trailblazing opportunity. We see this as an important step forward for UK innovation.

Through the Bill, we are exploring the establishment of an ambitious regulatory sandbox for MASS to enable safe trials, break down regulatory barriers and increase UK competitiveness on the global stage for commercial vessels. This could also support controlled testing of next generation defence technology in closely supervised environments, supporting national security while accelerating innovation, productivity and growth across the UK defence industrial base.

This would represent a historic shift in how novel technologies are regulated in the UK, with potential across both commercial and defence applications of maritime autonomy.

The period of operation for the sandbox is yet to be established and will be developed following extensive engagement with the sector.

We have already begun early engagement and will frontload as much as possible during the drafting and parliamentary stages of the Bill. I can confirm that Blair McDougall MP, as Minister for Small Business and Economic Transformation, has the overarching responsibility for the Regulating for Growth Bill.

Groom Court of Appeal Judgement

Finally, I have asked Virginia McVea, Chief Executive of the Maritime Coastguard Agency, to contact the member for North Norfolk directly to discuss his concerns about the response to the Groom Court of Appeal Judgement.

Yours sincerely,



Rt Hon Heidi Alexander MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT