



Department
for Transport

From the Secretary of State
The Rt. Hon. Grant Shapps

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Bill Hiron
Chairman
Association of Local Bus Managers

via email

25th March 2020

Dear Bill,

COVID-19 – Supporting the Bus Sector and its Passengers

The onset of coronavirus in England has had a significant impact on how people travel, the bus industry and its passengers. We understand the importance of bus services to communities, key workers and people taking essential journeys, and we are determined to support them. That is why I can confirm that the Department will continue to pay Bus Services Operators Grant on the basis of estimated service levels before the coronavirus outbreak and will not revise these estimates down where service levels have declined due to its impacts.

It is also essential that those passengers who still need to rely on the bus to get to work or buy food get the services they need. I am grateful to those companies and local authorities who have already agreed that buses will accept concessionary passengers before the usual 9.30am cut-off time. But with many shops now allowing elderly people dedicated access before 9.30am this now needs to be available nationally. I should be grateful if, from tomorrow, all local bus operators would accept the concessionary pass all day.

It is also vital that, when changing services to reflect reduced demand, your members ensure that bus operators continue to provide appropriate service levels for key workers, most particularly to hospitals, and that buses are not heavily loaded because of reduced service patterns. In doing so I would expect your members to do all that they can to ensure that they are always providing the services that local authorities consider are required. And as they amend timetables I cannot stress enough the importance of first class communication to passengers and local authorities, so that those for whom travel remains essential are absolutely clear about what buses will be running where and when.

I recognise that to achieve these outcomes you will want certainty on the revenue you will receive from the wider public sector, not just from my department. We are writing to every English local transport authority outside London to urge them to continue payments for tendered bus services and concessionary fares reimbursement at levels based on the position before the coronavirus outbreak.

These measures sit alongside the actions that the Senior Traffic Commissioner and his team have taken to ensure that changes to bus services can be made promptly in response to a shortage of drivers or reduced passenger demand. Operators will be able to send applications for temporary variation of services made at short notice, due to the exceptional nature of the situation, to both the Traffic Commissioner and relevant local authority at the same time and include a full timetable. I have asked local authorities to limit the time for consulting them to 24 hours instead of 28 days and fees have been waived for those applications linked to the coronavirus outbreak.

I have asked officials, and the buses Minister, Baroness Vere of Norbiton, to continue to work closely with the sector to understand what the ongoing risks and issues are, and how these could be addressed.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grant Shapps', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT