

Valerie Shawcross AM, Chair of the Transport Committee

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Rt. Hon. Theresa Villiers MP
Minister of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
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Date: 15 October 2010

Dear Ms Villiers

Response to consultation on reforming rail franchising

I am writing, on behalf of the London Assembly's cross-party Transport Committee, to set out our response to the Government's consultation on reforming rail franchising. This response is based on our previous work on rail services in London which is relevant to the consultation. Further details of all our work can be found at: <http://www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london/the-london-assembly/publications/transport>

At the outset, we wish to express support for the Mayor and TfL having a greater role in relation to rail franchises for London's suburban rail lines. On 23 July 2010, the London Assembly, the Mayor and London Councils wrote to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government about further devolution of powers to London. In this letter, we set out unanimous agreement for the Mayor having powers to award rail franchises for London's suburban rail lines jointly with the Secretary of State for Transport. We also wanted the Mayor to have a formal monitoring role over these franchises. These proposals are relevant to the request in the consultation for suggestions on how to improve the franchising system.

We believe that, if the Mayor and TfL had a greater role over the suburban rail franchises, it would help to improve the level of rail services in London. It could also help to increase public transport usage and connect different parts of London better. As our previous work has shown, rail services are a vital part of London's transport network. Their contribution to local travel is much greater in London than in any other metropolitan area in the UK. There are around 50 Overground rail routes into London with 75 per cent of all national rail journeys starting or finishing in the London area. Around 85 per cent of Londoners use the rail network. Yet, at present, many of the suburban rail lines are often poorly integrated with other parts of the London's transport network such as the Tube and buses. For passengers this can mean disjointed journeys with great variations in the quality of service and costs.

Our recent work on London's orbital rail network shows TfL can deliver improvements to rail services. In a published letter to the Mayor in July, we highlighted that, in just three years since it assumed direct responsibility, TfL had made great strides in developing London Overground. In the next two years, with the delivery of further planned improvements by TfL, including the East London Line extension phase 2, there is potential for London to have a truly orbital rail network. This will be a significant addition to London's transport system linking 20 London Boroughs and resulting in around one-third of Londoners living within 15 minutes of a London Overground station. We want the Mayor and TfL to have a greater role over franchises so they can expand on this work. This greater role

could ensure further enhancements to London's other rail services which, in turn, would help develop its transport system.

Our past work has shown that TfL can have a very positive impact on rail franchises. For example, our report *Stand and Deliver: Cycle Parking in London* (June 2009) highlighted that TfL's involvement in developing the specifications for the new South Central franchise had helped to deliver an additional 1,500 cycle parking spaces over the five-year term. Without such involvement it was unlikely train operating companies would deliver more cycle parking since this could involve them having to replace retail outlets or car parking spaces with cycle stands, which would involve a loss of revenue. If the Mayor and TfL had a greater role in relation to rail franchises, it could help ensure further such improvements to the services provided to London's rail passengers.

A new approach to rail franchising in London would help to ensure passengers receive a better service. Our work has often shown that passengers have significant concerns about existing rail services and their needs and expectations are not always met by train operating companies. A new approach could, for example, help to tackle the high levels of overcrowding on suburban trains. This was an issue covered in our report *The Big Squeeze: Rail Overcrowding in London* (February 2009). It could also ensure a greater consistency of service during poor weather. In our letter of 17 February 2010 to the then Secretary of State for Transport, we highlighted concerns about disruption to rail services during the snowfall in December 2009-January 2010. In particular, we were concerned that Southeastern had chosen to cancel its services in advance of snowfall whereas other train operating companies serving London had attempted to run their usual services. If the Mayor and TfL had a greater role over rail franchises in London, it could help to ensure such issues do not arise and passengers receive more consistent and better integrated rail services.

We trust this response will inform the consultation and look forward to receiving further details of the Government's revised policies for rail franchising later in the year.

Yours sincerely



Valerie Shawcross AM
Chair of the Transport Committee