

£56 million package to support light rail through recovery period

July 16, 2021



Light rail operators across England will benefit from up to £56 million in government funding to help ensure they continue to run vital services as coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions are lifted, Transport Minister Baroness Vere has announced today (16 July 2021).

The funding will run from 20 July to April 2022, and will support the following operators across the north and the Midlands:

- Manchester Metrolink
- Tyne and Wear Metro
- Sheffield Supertram
- Nottingham Express Transit
- West Midlands Metro
- Blackpool Tramway

It comes as the government invests billions of pounds to build back better from the pandemic and improve transport links across the country.

Transport Minister Baroness Vere said: “Light rail and tram services provide an essential service in our towns and cities, ensuring people can get to work, school or to see friends and family.

“This £56 million funding package will allow operators to keep running these vital services as normal in those initial months, as restrictions are lifted and passengers begin to return in higher numbers.”

Chief Secretary to the Treasury Steve Barclay said: “As our economy reopens, we’re continuing to support people and businesses – and making sure people can get to work and use public transport easily is crucial.

“Today’s funding means that thousands of people across England can continue to travel on public transport when they need to, and regular services can continue as the country comes out of restrictions.”

Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands, said: “Our West Midlands Metro service has operated throughout the pandemic and has seen patronage return very quickly each time restrictions have been lifted. This has shown just how important our trams are to commuters and our regional economy.

“It was critical, therefore, that we received this latest funding from government, and by being the longest funding package we have received so far it has given the West Midlands much-needed certainty.”

The funding package announced today will be the final tranche of COVID-19 related financial support to be given to the sector.

It comes after the government has already provided around £150 million to operators to ensure services have continued to run throughout the pandemic. The current emergency funding package will end on 19 July 2021.

Last week, the government announced a **£226.5 million funding package to support bus operators** across England, outside of London, through the recovery period.

Stephen Edwards, who leads for the Urban Transport Group on light rail, said:

‘We welcome this funding package which provides the basis for us to continue to provide tram and light rail services at a time when passenger numbers will be much lower than normal because of the pandemic. It is particularly welcome that this funding takes us through to April of next year which gives us a greater degree of certainty which will support long term planning.’

‘At a time when the public finances are stretched it is not surprising there are some challenging conditions attached to this funding which we will need to carefully assess. In particular the funding assumes we will see a sustained increase in passenger numbers as we recover from the effects of the restrictions we have had on our day to day lives. The way in which the pandemic will unfold in the coming months, and its impact on patronage, will be vital to our ability to sustain services.’

However, overall, this is a positive outcome for our light rail systems, and the people and places they serve, and I would like to extend our thanks to officials at both DfT and the Treasury for their hard work and constructive approach during the detailed and lengthy negotiations and discussions that led to this funding package.’

Image credit: Metrolink