

Back public transport to help high streets and avoid gridlock, businesses warn PM

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An unprecedented coalition of organisations representing shops, offices, restaurants, venues, public transport providers and trades unions has written to the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, urging him to encourage people back on to buses and trains as restrictions are lifted. A failure to get people back onto public transport risks towns and cities where people are more reliant on buses, trams and trains being left behind, they say.

The letter, which has been coordinated by sustainable transport charity Campaign for Better Transport, has been endorsed by leading business, leisure and hospitality organisations including the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), the British Retail Consortium (BRC), UK Hospitality and the CBI, as well as the umbrella organisations representing the rail and bus industries (the Rail Delivery Group and the Confederation of Passenger Transport).

Other organisations including the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) and the British Independent Retailers Association (BIRA) have also added their names, as well as the Urban Transport Group, which represents the local transport authorities for the largest urban areas. Taken together, these organisations represent hundreds of thousands of businesses employing millions of

people and which, pre-pandemic, helped people to make over 15 million daily journeys.

The letter calls on the Government to aid a full revival of the retail, leisure and hospitality businesses that form the beating heart of town and city centres across the country by helping to restore people's confidence in using public transport.

Paul Tuohy, Chief Executive of Campaign for Better Transport, said: "As England prepares to take the next step out of lockdown, it is vital that the Government sends a loud and clear message that travelling by public transport is both safe and desirable. Without this we risk slowing down the high street recovery as many people will simply stay away, or worse seeing towns and cities more reliant on public transport being left behind while car-heavy areas experience increased pollution and congestion."

In order to prevent a lasting legacy of shuttered businesses, economic inequality, increased congestion and more pollution, the letter urges the Prime Minister to:

- Send a visible message that buses and trains are safe to use when appropriate measures – like wearing a face covering – are followed, with ministers and others being seen to use public transport
- Take a balanced and pragmatic approach towards public transport in the ongoing review into social distancing, recognising the significant importance of buses, trains and trams to the economic recovery and air quality
- Make it simple and easy for people to choose and pay for their fare and know they are getting the best deal by reforming fares and ticket retailing across public transport to help both passengers and businesses in the recovery.

Shevaun Haviland, Director General of the BCC, said: "Renewed confidence in public transport will be vital to economic recovery. As more people venture back to offices and travel further afield for leisure, it's important that they understand the stringent safety measures deployed by transport companies and feel safe to travel on buses, trains and trams across the transport network."

Matthew Fell, Chief UK Policy Director at the CBI, said: "Public transport has a vital role to play as the UK begins to look beyond pandemic recovery and towards a greener tomorrow. However, work is urgently needed to restore user confidence, alongside substantial investment in the technology and infrastructure needed to build a network fit for the future."

Kate Nicholls, CEO of UK Hospitality, said: "It is vital for hospitality – and for Britain's beleaguered high streets – that the public know that they can travel safely into towns and cities. Considerable efforts and investments have ensured that it is safe to do so, and that fact must be conveyed far and wide."

Emma McClarkin, CEO of the BBPA, said: "It is vital for our economy that people are welcomed back into our towns and cities in the coming weeks. Pubs are people businesses and without bustling towns thousands will struggle to survive. Public transport is a key part in getting our communities back on their feet."

Paul Nowak, Deputy General Secretary of the TUC, said: "Transport staff and their unions have played a key frontline role during the pandemic. They will be at the heart of our recovery too, as more workers

commute again and we rebuild a greener economy. The Government must show its commitment to public transport by making sure services are seamlessly connected, affordable and safe.”

Michael Kill, CEO of the NTIA, said: “The Night Time Economy relies heavily on the transport infrastructure of cities and towns across the country, it is important when travelling at night that people know that they are safe. A considerable amount of planning and investment has gone into ensuring people can travel safely, and we must ensure that this message forms the foundation of the industries recovery”

The signatories of the letter are: Emma McClarkin, CEO, British Beer and Pub Association; Shevaun Haviland, Director General, British Chamber of Commerce; Andrew Goodacre, CEO, British Independent Retailers Association; Helen Dickinson, CEO, British Retail Consortium; Paul Tuohy, Chief Executive, Campaign for Better Transport; Matthew Fell, Chief UK Policy Director, CBI; Graham Vidler, Chief Executive, Confederation of Passenger Transport; Craig Beaumont, Chief of External Affairs, Federation of Small Businesses; John Dickie, Interim Chief Executive, London First; Jace Tyrrell, Chief Executive, New West End Company; Michael Kill, Chief Executive Officer, Night Time Industries Association; Andy Bagnall, Director General, Rail Delivery Group; Paul Nowak, Deputy General Secretary, TUC; Julian Bird, Chief Executive, UK Theatre and Society of London Theatre; James Hammett, Managing Director, UK Tram; Kate Nicholls, CEO, UK Hospitality; and Laura Shoaf, Chair, Urban Transport Group.

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