

# Further £33 million COVID-19 support funding announced for light rail and trams

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A further £33 million of emergency coronavirus (COVID-19) funding has been provided to support light rail and tram operators during the pandemic.

Operators will receive emergency funding of up to £33 million over the next 11 weeks, building on over £160 million in funding that has already been announced by the UK government for light rail and trams during the pandemic – and taking the total support so far to nearly £200 million.

The funding will support operators as they continue to face reduced revenues caused by low passenger numbers. It will ensure these vital services remain viable for the future, as the country prepares to ease lockdown restrictions and people start travelling more frequently.

Transport Minister Baroness Vere said: “As the country opens up in line with the roadmap out of lockdown, we want light rail and tram services to be available to passengers and running as normal.

“That’s why we’re continuing to fund these vital transport systems, ensuring that they’re available now and are ready for people to use when restrictions ease.”

Chief Secretary to the Treasury Steve Barclay said: “At the start of this pandemic, we promised to do everything we could to support people and businesses. That includes making sure our country’s vital infrastructure is running for people who rely on it – such as key workers and those travelling to schools.

“Today’s funding means thousands of people across the north of England and the Midlands can continue to travel on public transport when they need to, and that trams will be ready for when the country comes out of lockdown.”

Funding will be provided for the next 11 weeks, with a review of the need for further funding for these systems taking place before the end of that period.

Before the pandemic, more than 119 million journeys were taken by light rail or tram each year on systems outside of London, highlighting the importance of these transport networks across the north and Midlands.

Responding to the announcement, UKTram Managing Director James Hammett, commented: “While the recently published ‘road map’ out of lockdown has brought some cautious optimism, any significant return to pre-pandemic passenger numbers is still many months away.

“This vital additional funding will help the sector to continue delivering a service that’s proved essential for many key workers through the pandemic and has an important role to play as many businesses start to reopen.”

Mr Hammett also welcomed comments by Transport Minister Baroness Vere and Chief Secretary to the Treasury Steve Barclay, who expressed their commitment to the keeping the country’s vital infrastructure running for people who rely on it.

Since the first restrictions were introduced, UKTram has been in constant dialogue with both the UK and devolved governments, proving them with up-to-date intelligence on the sector’s response to the crisis and the impact it has had on operations and revenue.

These constructive talks, together with the co-ordinated efforts of operators and other organisations, have helped to secure previous rounds of funding, which totalled around £160 million for systems in England and £21 million from Transport Scotland for Edinburgh Trams and Glasgow Subway.

“Together with partners from across the sector, we will continue to work closely with both the UK and Scottish governments on longer-term support for the sector post-pandemic and ensure light rail fulfils its potential to help deliver wider economic recovery,” Mr Hammett added.

*Photo credit: Nexus*