

Government support package to support the light rail systems

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- government pledges support for freight services to protect flow of goods between the UK, mainland Europe and Northern Ireland
- UK, Ireland and France also agree joint commitment to protecting freight during pandemic
- light rail systems in Sheffield, Manchester, West Midlands, Nottingham and Tyne and Wear also set to receive support
- thousands of volunteers from transport sector are put on standby to support frontline services as new 'Transport Support Unit (TSU)' established, alongside hundreds of government vehicles from the transport network

The government has confirmed it will support the light rail systems in Sheffield, Manchester, West Midlands, Nottingham, and Tyne and Wear.

In a statement released on Friday, it says it is working with local authorities to identify what support is needed to allow essential services to continue.

The news comes after we reported the calls for regional light rail services to receive same level of support that other train operating companies have received during the coronavirus crisis.

Metro light rail systems are losing millions of pounds a month which are currently not covered by the Treasury's support for rail operators during the lockdown.

The Metro needs a £10m bailout by July as passenger numbers have dropped by 95% since the start of the lockdown.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps, said: "Essential supplies are continuing to flow well, but operators are facing challenges as fewer people travelling means less capacity to move goods.

"Today's action will help ensure all parts of the UK have the capacity they need and, following on from our action to support the rail and bus sectors, it shows how this government is acting to protect the transport links the country relies on.

"Now more than ever we need to work closely together, and the new Transport Support Unit (TSU) stands ready to help our frontline staff and deliver crucial supplies."

Dan Jarvis, Mayor of the Sheffield City Region says the support from the government will ensure that the Supertram system in South Yorkshire can continue to run for key workers during the Coronavirus pandemic.

The Mayor has been pressing Government Ministers since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure tram and light rail have the support they need to continue running, as well as buses, working with SYPT and operators to ensure key services continue to run, particularly for workers travelling to Sheffield's hospitals.

The Mayor was the first to raise the issue with other Metro Mayors and called for collective action to ensure other city region's systems were supported following a significant fall in passenger numbers.

Mayor Dan Jarvis said: "I've been working around the clock to ensure that South Yorkshire has the resources it needs to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic. Earlier this month I took action and extended concessionary payments and agreed a substantial package of support for bus operators.

"This meant that essential services could continue running for key workers, but also provided certainty to our transport system so normal services can resume when travel restrictions are lifted. However, there remained a gap in support for Supertram and I have been in close contact with Government Ministers to address this. I am pleased they have listened and have acted. The funding will be welcome news for passengers.

"Securing this funding for Supertram will help ease the financial strain during the crisis, allow essential journeys to continue and keep NHS staff and key workers moving during this critical time, particularly to Sheffield's hospitals."

Photo credit: Nexus