

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

August 10, 2020

Dear Mr Shapps

Bus commuter corridors in Cumbria

Tourism is hugely important to Cumbria's economy. Prior to Covid-19 the sector was worth £2.9bn a year and supported 65,000 jobs. However, businesses in the Lake District have long had difficulty recruiting. The resident population of the national park has been declining since the 1960s as demand for second homes, holiday lets and retirement homes has driven up house prices forcing young people to move away.

Employers have become dependent on live-in EU migrant workers. The new immigration system closes this option because most jobs in the visitor economy pay below the required salary threshold. A survey we carried out in 2017 found businesses where more than 50% of staff were EU migrants. They fear for their future when access to migrants stops.

The obvious solution is for workers to commute to the Lake District from surrounding communities such as Barrow-in-Furness, Carlisle and Workington where unemployment is higher. Only car owners can do this at present. Cumbria County Council ceased all bus subsidies in 2014. Surviving routes into the Lake District are geared almost entirely to the needs of visitors. It is impractical, for example, to commute from Barrow to Ambleside or from Carlisle to Keswick. The lack of bus services was cited time and again as an impediment to recruitment when we carried out a transport survey in 2018.

Where buses do run, fares are too expensive for workers on modest incomes. For example, the four-mile journey from Grasmere to Ambleside costs £4.90. A journey of that length in London, where buses are subsidised, is £1.50. Some larger employers lay on transport to bring in staff from outside the national park. We know of a large hotel near Ambleside that spends £120,000 a year doing this. But it isn't a realistic option for smaller establishments because they don't employ the numbers to justify provision of their own transport.

The answer, we believe, is to set up bus commuter corridors to allow workers without cars to access jobs in the Lake District – subsidised services, running frequently from early morning to late evening, at affordable fares. Stagecoach, the principal bus operator in Cumbria, is a willing partner in this endeavour. We anticipate that, long term, growth in demand would make such routes commercially viable. We hope you will give the proposal serious consideration. It sits well with the Government's levelling-up agenda and would help our businesses recover from Covid-19 and adapt to the post-Brexit environment.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



ROB JOHNSTON MBE FCIM
Chief Executive, Cumbria Chamber of Commerce



Cumbria
Chamber of Commerce

Carlisle
Broadacre House
16 - 20 Lowther Street
Carlisle
Cumbria CA3 8DA
Tel: 0845 22 600 40

West Cumbria
Innovation Centre
Westlakes Science Park
Moor Row, Whitehaven
Cumbria CA24 3TP
Tel: 01946 592329

South Lakeland
25 Stramongate
Kendal
Cumbria LA9 4BH
Tel: 01539 735891

Furness
Phoenix Business Park
Phoenix Business Centre
Barrow-in-Furness
Cumbria LA14 2UA
Tel: 01229 840253

E: info@cumbriachamber.co.uk
W: www.cumbriachamber.co.uk

