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To Council Leaders & Regional Transport
Partnership Chairs

22 May 2020

Colleagues,

Transport Transition Plan Engagement

I would like to thank you and your Council for the significant work that you have undertaken during this unprecedented time to keep the local transport networks safe and operational.

During the Scottish Parliament Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee meeting on the 13 May 2020, I outlined our intention to set out how our Transport Transition Plan will support Scotland's people and businesses on our transition out of lockdown. Further detail can be found at <https://www.transport.gov.scot/news/cabinet-secretary-sets-out-latest-transport-response-to-covid-19-outbreak/>. This will be an evolving process and we will engage Local Authorities and Regional Transport Authorities as it develops.

We are drawing together evidence to inform our plan, however one clear and significant challenge is around public transport. During lock down demand for public transport has fallen by between 85 and 90 per cent against 'normal' since 23 March. As we move towards easing lock down measures operators are estimating that capacity will be between 10 and 25 per cent of 'normal' with the level of physical distancing required. There is a risk this will result in increased private car use, leading to congestion, poor air quality and increased transport inequalities, particularly for the 29 per cent of households in Scotland that do not have access to a car.

We continue to take action to stabilise the transport system and prepare for physical distancing. Further details on the action I have taken can be viewed at <https://www.transport.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>. A key focus of our on-going work is to ensure that we continue to support a green recovery to deliver our Climate Change commitments and reduce inequalities.

As our national work continues I know you will also be leading your local and regional transport planning responses, in line with your transport responsibilities, which I recognise will be central to the success of the transition. I would encourage you to continue to take a cross boundary approach with your neighbouring authorities where needed.

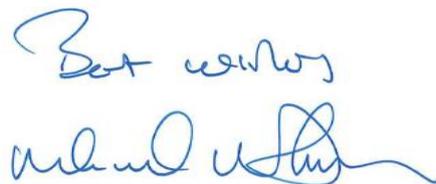
While we have already been working closely, there will be a continuing need for collaboration to align approaches across our respective transport networks. I therefore intend to include within the Transport Transition Plan a statement on how we continue to engage with local authorities, regional transport partnerships and operators to operationalise the measures across Scotland. I would therefore ask you to consider what Transport Scotland input you may require in relation to your own transition transport planning. Please forward this to Amy Phillips (Amy.Phillips@transport.gov.scot) at Transport Scotland in the first instance.

Our engagement to date has reflected the differing challenges across the country, such as the on-going ferry operation discussions we have held with Island Authorities from start of the crisis. In the short term, Transport Scotland is also looking to engage directly with the local authorities in the Edinburgh and Glasgow city regions at an operational officer level. The urgency and scale of the public transport challenge in these areas requires immediate joined up working to manage the operational interactions between the respective networks for which we are responsible.

We are not seeking to underplay the challenges across rural areas of Scotland, other cities and areas of the country. We value Local Authorities' consideration in this regard, therefore I have asked for a Transport Transition Plan National Advisory Group to be set up with proposed membership to include representatives from COSLA, SOLACE, RTPs, SCOTS and other selected members.

We have held on-going discussions with COSLA, SOLACE, RTPs and SCOTS since the start of the emergency and will continue engagement on the Transport Transition Plan in the coming weeks as outlined above.

We look forward to engaging on our respective plans as we rise to the collective transport challenges as we safely transition out of lockdown to the new normal.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael Matheson', written in a cursive style.

MICHAEL MATHESON