

Transport Committee – 8 December 2016

Transcript of Item 6 – Surface Transport Access to Heathrow Airport (Statement by Deputy Mayor for Transport on Rail Devolution)

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): I was going to ask the Deputy Mayor for Transport if you want to give us an update on the devolution of rail, if there is anything you want to add given that it has been topical in the last couple of days and if there is anything you want to add on that.

Valerie Shawcross CBE (Deputy Mayor for Transport): Thank you very much, Caroline. As you know, it is a topic very close to my heart and to other Members here and it has been a long-running issue.

The main thing to say is that I am confident - and I am sure you have all seen it now because we were very public with it - that the business case that went in was completely credible and was extremely positive. There were long technical discussions between the Department for Transport (DfT) and TfL about it. We are confident that it was a very sound business case and that TfL demonstrated in some detail how improvements to services would derive from the changed contracting structure and the changed management, all associated with rail devolution.

Therefore, we are hugely disappointed that the Secretary of State [for Transport] has not taken this opportunity to improve the quality of life and the economy for south Londoners over a period of time.

Although the decision has been now taken by the Secretary of State, it is so important that our approach is that we are not going to take no for an answer. It is too important. We are going to have a last-ditch attempt at getting the Government as a whole to have a rethink about this.

I have been encouraged by the number of political representatives of all parties from in and outside London and the business community who really want to see rail devolution happen. This is a cross-party agenda. It is about public services. We are encouraging everybody who feels as strongly as we do that this is a huge missed opportunity for south London and the areas around London. Sevenoaks is one of the areas where we have had the strongest support for this because their economy and housebuilding programme is predicated on improvements. We are going to carry on.

We think that the drop-dead date for this round of franchising for Southeastern is probably mid-January and so between now and Christmas we are doing everything we can to get the Prime Minister and the Chancellor to look at this because it is a very rational case. It should not be a party political issue. It is a very rational case to look at.

As passengers and the public realise what is in danger now and what is slipping away, they will be very disappointed. Please, if you are still supportive of this agenda, let us not take no for an answer at this stage.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you very much. I will continue the correspondence. I have had Sadiq's [Khan, Mayor of London] letter this morning on this and we will be writing as a Committee to the Prime Minister and others setting out the case and so we will be adding to that.

Valerie Shawcross CBE (Deputy Mayor for Transport): Thank you very much.