DAN JARVIS
MAYOR
OF SOUTH YORKSHIRE

South Yorkshire
Mayoral Combined Authority
11 Broad Street West
Sheffield, S1 2BQ

8 February 2022

Mr Martin Griffiths
Chief Executive
Stagecoach Group
10 Dunkeld Road
PERTH
PH1 5TW

Sent by email martin.griffiths@stagecoachgroup.com

Dear Martin

I am writing to express my deep disappointment at your decision to raise fares in South Yorkshire, and by news of planned cuts to services. I am writing to ask you to reconsider.

Our buses are under exceptional pressure. In the face of this challenge it is critical that we act for the long-term, following a deliberate plan to minimise the damage caused by Covid and protect the network so we can not only build back but deliver the transformation of our services that our region so badly needs.

We need operators to be partners in that effort, to take some responsibility for the wider health of public transport which you say you support. That responsibility is implied in the Enhanced Partnership your local subsidiary agreed, and which is currently under public consultation.

Instead operators appear to be acting according to one concern only: their short-term bottom line. You are rushing to cuts even as Covid rates remain high and many people are still working from home. Rather than maximising the chances of a full recovery in passenger numbers, by hiking fares and slashing services at the earliest possible moment you are guaranteeing that recovery will not happen – locking in damage from Covid that might otherwise have been temporary. If we want to realise the potential of our buses, this is strategic short-sightedness of the worst kind.

I understand the genuine pressures operators are under – as indeed are our communities and the travelling public. The government's failure so far to extend Covid support for bus services is utterly reckless, as is their reneging on wider promises of transformative investment. Along with other regional Mayors, I've made those points to government in no uncertain terms.

But let's not forget that your company received millions of pounds of subsidy to keep services running – at a profit – during lockdown. I am not asking companies to bankrupt themselves operating at a loss indefinitely, but the least South Yorkshire has a right to expect is that you reduce cuts and fare rises to the minimum as we get back to normal, even if that means reduced profits or even a short term loss.

It is time to give something back – and that means cancelling the changes that are currently being planned.

That would allow us to make managed changes to the system and avoid fuelling a vicious cycle of decline. We have already shown our willingness to invest, and we will continue to press the government to honour their promises to do the same. Together we can not only get through this crisis, but begin to change our buses for the better. To do that though, we need operators to act like genuine partners.

I would be grateful for the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these issues at the earliest opportunity.

Your sincerely,

Mayor Dan Jarvis MBE MP

South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority