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Transport is the backbone of our economy, and it is a generally accepted fact that the state of any area's transport network relates directly to its economic and social success. Many hon. Members have referred to IPPR North's recent paper on the subject, which argued convincingly that the lack of investment and improvement in transport—particularly public transport—in northern England is one of the biggest checks on the region's economic growth. Like many others, including Yorkshire Forward and just about every hon. Member who has contributed to the debate, IPPR North remains concerned about the level of investment in the region's transport.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Greg Mulholland) referred to the figures supplied to us by PTEG, which show that Yorkshire and Humber received only a third of the public expenditure that London received in 2006-07. My region, the north-west, was not much better off, receiving £276 a head, which is less than the average for England, at £305 a head, and considerably less than London's £614 a head. Of course, the difference in investment between London and the north will not come as a surprise to any of us, and we will all have argued in relation to our own constituencies that funding seems all too often to be skewed in favour of the south. Obviously, we understand that London is the capital and therefore a special case, and all that I am arguing is that the north also deserves a transport system that can support its economic growth and its citizens' social needs. Is the Minister therefore considering reviewing the funding allocations for transport to ensure that all regions get their fair share?

The lack of investment in the region's public transport is particularly worrying. I have listened to contributions from hon. Members both sides of the Chamber, and it seems to be universally accepted that significant investment must be made in the region's train services. The IPPR North report stated:

"It is widely recognised that the main rail links between the North and South of England are not likely to be adequate to support sustainable growth over the coming decades"

and that rail links in the north are not "fit for purpose". As I mentioned in questions to the Secretary of State for Transport just last week, it is a fact that, on too many train journeys, people are left without a seat, certainly in the Yorkshire and Humber region. As in the north-west, overcrowding is a significant problem on trains. According to PTEG, and as we have heard, a quarter of all local train arrivals at Leeds in the morning peak period have passenger loadings in excess of 135 per cent. of seated capacity.

If we want to encourage more people on to public transport, it is pretty obvious that we desperately need extra capacity, because no one will want to travel by train if they know in advance that the likelihood of getting a seat is remote. Therefore, there needs to be an urgent assessment of rail services in the north and of the introduction of high-speed rail services to London. That should be looked at as soon as possible, and I ask the Minister to address that question specifically in her response and to tell us if and when a proper cost-benefit analysis of such schemes will take place.

More specifically, I understand that First Group, which runs the trans-Pennine service, is in negotiations with the Government to add a fourth carriage to its

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trains to increase capacity by 20 per cent. and that that would be in exchange for an extension to its franchise. I also understand that it is looking to buy new rolling stock, but that it needs the go-ahead from the Government before it does so, so that the stock will continue to be used if the franchise changes hands. Will the Minister update us on what stage the negotiations with First Group have reached and give us an assurance that the Government are committed to working with First Group to ensure that capacity is increased on the trans-Pennine service?

One problem with transport is that it is nearly always more efficient in cost-benefit terms to create services in city regions than in rural ones. In particular, bus services for countryside communities often suffer first when funding is tight, because they do not make as much money as urban transport services tend to. There are not many rural areas that will say that their bus services have not been reduced in recent years. That is certainly no less true of the Yorkshire and Humber region, and we must ensure that rural bus services in the region are protected to reduce social exclusion.

One possible way of increasing bus passenger numbers—I say this in reference to the point made by the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac)—would be to introduce a system that allowed passengers to travel more easily between different areas. We could have a cross-regional smartcard system similar to the Oyster card in London to encourage more people to use buses and, I hope, ensure that more of the region's bus services remained sustainable. Perhaps the Minister could also touch on that.

Obviously, we need to keep in mind at all times the need to ensure that all forms of transport are sustainable and to help move England towards a carbon-neutral future. As we know, transport contributes highly to greenhouse gas emissions, and we must ensure that improvements and extensions are not accomplished at the expense of the environment.

The transport system in the Yorkshire and Humber region obviously needs significantly increased investment to support economic growth, reduce social exclusion and improve environmental sustainability. With a population of 5 million, the region is a vibrant, successful and hugely important part of the UK, but it deserves better. I very much hope that the Minister is listening to the concerns of the region's residents, as they have been expressed today, and I look forward to her response.

12.8 pm

Mr. Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Stuart) on securing this debate on transport spending in Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire.

Shona McIsaac: The hon. Gentleman mentioned north Lincolnshire, but both north Lincolnshire and north-east Lincolnshire are on the south bank of the Humber, and it would be unfair to leave out north-east Lincolnshire.

Mr. Goodwill: I stand corrected.

The picture that my hon. Friend painted has certainly been reflected in contributions from all parts of the region. The picture of under-investment over a long

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period, with our region being bottom of the list, seems to have hit home. My hon. Friend specifically mentioned the A1079, which I drove down last Friday, and the road is a story of congestion and carnage.

I was very pleased when the right hon. Lady was appointed Minister for the region. I am not sure what influence she will have over other Ministers in the areas of health and education, but when it comes to transport, she will be able to lobby herself. I hope that she will quickly respond to many of the concerns that have been expressed. In particular, I hope that she responds to the "Road to Ruin" campaign run by the *Yorkshire Post*, which has highlighted some of the points very clearly.

The figures speak for themselves. In 2006–07, per capita spending in our region was £215. In London, the figure was £614, and for the UK as a whole, £319. As the hon. Member for Pudsey (Mr. Truswell) said, we should have a fairer share of the cake. How can the Minister justify the continuation of this sorry state of affairs? She cannot pass the buck because she has a dual ministerial responsibility.

Mention has been made of the IPPR report. On 28 February, Howard Reed, its chief economist, wrote that such effects could be transient given the existence of large projects in the pipeline to widen the M1 and the M62. However, last week, along with the announcement that the hard-shoulder running pilot on the M42 was to be extended, came the announcement that the widening of the M6, M62 and M1 was to be scrapped, which many people did not notice. Will the Minister assure us that such schemes will still go ahead? At the Dispatch Box last week, the Secretary of State was less than clear about those other motorways.

As shadow spokesman for Leeds, I do not get such a big bit of the region to represent. I am particularly concerned about the transport problems in Leeds. Leeds is the largest city in Europe without a light rail or metro system. For example, Frankfurt has a population of 650,000, compared with 725,000 for Leeds. Yet Frankfurt has 63 km of tramway and 56 km of underground. Even without additional unplanned intervention and investment, the Leeds city region economy is forecast to create 65,300 net additional jobs, and for gross value added to increase to £53.3 billion by 2015. The promise of a super tram in Leeds was axed by this Government. Some £39 million, which had been spent planning for that scheme, has been wasted. That is money down the drain. Leeds is now considering a trolley bus scheme—a second best scheme—which will share the same infrastructure as the cars and buses.

Hugh Bayley: The hon. Gentleman speaks on behalf of his party. If his party were to form a Government, would it increase investment in Yorkshire over and above the Government's plans?

Mr. Goodwill: When I was invited by the leader of my party to take responsibility for both Leeds and transport, he made it clear that he wanted to see the north get a fairer share of the cake. I suspect that the overall transport spend will depend on the mess that we are left with when we once again form a Government. No doubt we will learn more about spending during the Budget speech tomorrow. I am also concerned that many of the projects that the Government have encouraged local authorities to take up through the

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transport innovation fund often have strings attached. I am concerned that in order to access funding, congestion charging schemes may be forced on councils and communities against their wishes.

Last Friday, I was in the city of Hull, in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). I had been invited there by businesses and local councillors to see Castle street, which is at the end of the A63. I was told that Hull had a booming economy, with its new marina development, The Deep, which is a fantastic tourist development, a new freight terminal coming on stream that will increase the capacity of the port by 1.2 million tonnes, and the Princes Quay shopping centre. We have 9,000 jobs in that area involved in making caravans and mobile homes. Some 1.2 million passengers pass through the port of Hull on to P&O ferries. I was told that if one wishes to make a journey with an HGV from Liverpool to Leningrad, there are only five roundabouts on the route, and they are all in the middle of Hull. May I invite the Minister to visit Hull—

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Ms Rosie Winterton): I have been there already.

Mr. Goodwill: She has been already. Perhaps she can look at that particular problem because it is a regional priority. I was very impressed to see that Hull was catching up with cities such as Leeds and Newcastle. For far too long, Hull has been the poor relation. I am pleased to see that it is catching up, but it needs infrastructure investment.

I could not speak on this subject without mentioning my own constituency and the A64. A number of employers constantly lobby me about the lack of investment on that road. Recently, we had some very bad news. The printing company, Polestar Greaves, which had recently secured European funding for a new plant in Sheffield at the heart of the motorway network, closed its plants in Scarborough. One of the reasons it cited was the problem getting heavy print in and out of Scarborough.

As for rail, we have an overall problem with overcrowding. Overcrowding levels, to which the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Greg Mulholland) alluded, are worse in Yorkshire than the south-east. The rate of passengers above capacity in London and the south-east in the morning peak is 5 per cent. In West Yorkshire, it is 9 per cent. in the morning peak and 5.3 per cent. in the evening. So we need to look at our rail infrastructure. All too often, Ministers talk about investment when they mean investment and spending. It is important to make a clear distinction between subsidies paid to railway companies and investment in new infrastructure and improvements. I met the boss of Northern Rail, who told me that on her entire network, which covers much of our region, for every pound that she gets in the fare box, she gets another 80p in subsidy. It is important that we see what we are getting in addition to those subsidies that will contribute to an improvement in our rail system.

I pay tribute to Hull Trains which, as an open-access operator, is providing an excellent service from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Stuart). Also, dare I mention Grand Central, the new open-access operator that runs from Sunderland, through York to King's Cross, which

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offers a non-stop service four times a day from York. It offers passengers a 50 per cent. refund on the price of their ticket if they cannot get a seat on the train. I have been on that train a number of times; there is not much chance of not getting a seat at the moment. As word spreads on those good deals, however, that may change. It is a very good initiative and it would be interesting to see whether other rail operators follow suit.

Last April, the leader of my party, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), was on the record saying that there must be a shift in focus on transport spending from the south to the north and plans to extend rail. My hon. Friends the Members for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) and for Chipping Barnet (Mrs. Villiers) are undertaking a feasibility study with industry professionals of the possibility of building a high-speed rail network in the UK. Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds are the cities in line to be connected into that network, as well as other north-south options.

This Labour Government have seen many lost opportunities. When they came to power, they followed the spending commitment in total, but they axed the road programme for three years and diverted that money to other objectives. Wherever we are now, we are three years behind where we could have been. They squandered the economic legacy of the last Conservative Government. As we will hear tomorrow in the Budget, the party is over and the future is not so "Rosie" in regard to additional money being available. We will be seeing additional cuts all over the place. The problem with transport is that it is easy to cut because one only has to nudge that spending into the next year's budget. Labour has dominated much of this region over the past 10 years, so why have we lost out so much? The "Road to Ruin" campaign by the *Yorkshire Post* has highlighted that. Could it be that the lack of regional vision and commitment will put the Government on the road to electoral ruin in 2009 or 2010?

12.19 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Ms Rosie Winterton): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Bercow. I congratulate the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Stuart) on securing this debate and on the way in which he conducted his opening remarks. I can assure him and other hon. Members who have contributed, especially the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr. Goodwill), that I am aware of the level of interest in transport in Yorkshire and the Humber, not least because of my role as a regional Minister. Transport and skills are two of our highest priorities for ensuring the economic competitiveness of our region.

I want to emphasise what the Government have done to increase investment in transport in our region—a subject on which the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mark Hunter) asked me to touch. In fact, spending on road and rail has nearly doubled from about £330 million in 2001 to almost £600 million in 2007-08. At the end of last year, we announced £469 million-worth of funding over the next three years for local authorities across the Yorkshire and Humber region to invest in highway maintenance and small schemes, such as public transport

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projects and town centre improvements. That represents a total allocation for 2010-11 that is 12 per cent. higher than current levels. In July 2006, we announced plans to fund 31 major road and public transport schemes in Yorkshire and the Humber from the £927 million allocated over the next 10 years in response to regional advice about priorities in the region.

I must challenge very clearly some of the points made today about Yorkshire and the Humber being at the bottom of the list of spending priorities. Total funding per head in Yorkshire and the Humber, when we combine the local transport plans and the regional funding and road safety allocations, is the third highest of all the regions. The hon. Members for Beverley and Holderness and for Leeds, North-West (Greg Mulholland) referred to the A1079 and the Leeds supertram respectively, funding for both of which would have to come out of those allocations. Opposition Members are wrong about Yorkshire and the Humber being at the bottom of the scale for allocations for those schemes. Spending per head and the allocations in our region, from which funding for those schemes would come, are the third highest of all the regions.

It is important to remember that the region has a very clear way of deciding its priorities. We devolved to the regional assembly an allocation of £927 million of regional funding, so that it could decide its own priorities which, after much hard work, it did. However, owing to ballooning costs of the supertram, it became very difficult to sustain that project through the regional funding allocation. Funding for the A1079 also comes from that regional pot. The priorities are being looked at to ensure that they are right. Furthermore, headroom for additional spending is being considered.

It was worrying that the Leader of the Opposition went to Yorkshire and said that before the next election he would produce a list of bypasses and road schemes for Yorkshire that might well completely overturn all the decisions on priorities made through our regional assembly and transport board. Where will that leave many of the proposed schemes, on which much work has been done? Opposition Members ought to think about that. In his rather mean-minded speech, the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West asked me three questions, but I ask three of him: does he say that the Leeds supertram will go ahead? What cost is he prepared to pay for it, and what other schemes would he sacrifice in the region to pay for it?

Mr. Graham Stuart: I am not quite clear, but I think that the Minister suggested that we are all mistaken in thinking that Yorkshire and the Humber has received the lowest transport spending over the past five years. Will she confirm whether cumulatively we have had less spent per head than any other region over the past five years? If that is not the case, I must have looked at the wrong tables, and the whole premise of this debate is unfounded. Given that I have taken my numbers from Department for Transport figures, I would like her to clarify the position.

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