



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

14 February 2020

Dear Grant,

Further to the Prime Minister's announcement that he has asked UK officials to look into the feasibility of a bridge between Northern Ireland and Scotland, I have had the opportunity to discuss the matter with Minister Nichola Mallon - my counterpart in the Northern Ireland Executive – and I am writing to you to express my concerns about these proposals.

Firstly, I was surprised to hear the Prime Minister's announcement, without any prior discussion, given that transport is devolved to both Scotland and Northern Ireland. This is despite regular requests for information from your officials at the Department for Transport over the course of the last few months.

In both Northern Ireland and Scotland, budget constraints from successive UK Governments, have for a number of years restricted necessary investment in public transport and vital infrastructure and held back progress for our communities.

Going forward I believe infrastructure investment should be focused on projects that will improve lives, boost our economy and connectivity, support communities and crucially work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero.

I strongly believe that if £20 billion is available for investment in infrastructure in Scotland and Northern Ireland that rather than indulging the Prime Minister with this vanity project, such funding should be made available to our respective governments so it could be better spent on meeting the priorities of the people we represent.

I therefore request immediate discussions with your officials on releasing to us the £20bn of funding you have identified so it can be invested in the priorities of Northern Ireland and Scotland.

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There are a number of proposals already on the table which would improve connectivity between the North of Ireland and Scotland, without the technical and logistical challenges involved in your proposal, and which we could develop if there is £20bn available to us.

By spending just a fraction of the cost of this bridge, I believe we could bring significantly more benefits to the people of Scotland and Northern Ireland, making a real difference to improving lives.

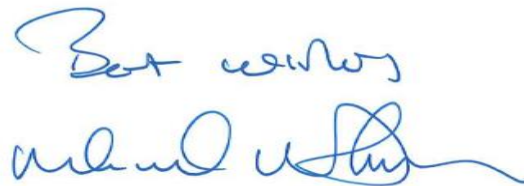
I am concerned that pursuit of this in light of the already identified technical, logistical and safety challenges such as the Beaufort's Dyke munitions dump could waste significant money and resource that could be put to better use on practical, deliverable projects.

Given transport is devolved to both the Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive, I look forward to hearing from you on the availability of the £20bn to us, and to assurances that in future, any such proposals will be discussed with us first and will fully respect the devolved settlements and the role of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Scottish Parliament.

I look forward to your response

I am copying this letter to Nichola Mallon MLA, Minister for Infrastructure.

Yours sincerely



Michael Matheson

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