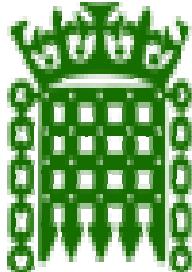




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“TramTrain does it Greener and Cheaper on lightly used railway lines and in the streets”

Croydon Tram Incident 14 November 2016



Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD)

"On behalf of the all-party group on light rail, I would like pay my condolences to all those affected, in particular to the families of those who died and those who were injured, as well as to the whole community and to the Minister, the constituency MP, for the burden he has had to shoulder over these awful few days.

What is particularly shocking about this awful tragedy is that light rail is such a safe form of travel, with 300 million passengers every year. The last passenger killed on a tram in this country had been in 1959. It is clear that this was one incident on one part of track. I am not asking the Minister, in looking at the incident and finding out what went wrong, to speculate on whether there was an engineering error, a human error or both. However, will he assure the House that he will make it clear to colleagues that light rail remains a safe form of travel and encourage his constituents and others to keep using the wonderful tram system that has, on this rare occasion, failed people badly?"

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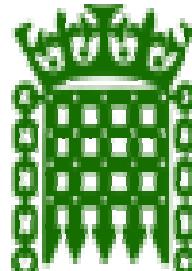


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- The Minister for London (Gavin Barwell)

With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the tragic tram derailment in the early hours of Wednesday 9 November, close to Sandilands junction in Croydon.

The tram was running from New Addington to Wimbledon via Croydon town centre. Sandilands junction is the point where inbound trams from the Beckenham Junction, Elmers End and New Addington routes converge shortly before they arrive at Sandilands tram stop to the east of Croydon town centre. Trams approaching from New Addington have to negotiate a sharp, left-hand curve with a speed limit of 12 mph before reaching the junction. The derailment occurred on the curve and the Rail Accident Investigation Branch says that initial indications suggest that the tram was travelling at a significantly higher speed than is permitted.

Seven people lost their lives—Dane Chinnery, Robert Huxley, Philip Logan, Dorota Rynkiewicz and Phil Seary from New Addington, and Donald Collett and Mark Smith from Croydon. A further 51 people were injured and a number are still in hospital. Our thoughts at this time are with the families and friends of the bereaved, and the injured.

I visited the scene with the Mayor of London and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on Wednesday, and again on Thursday and Friday. I would like to take this opportunity to express my profound thanks to staff from London's emergency services, Transport for London and the RAIB for their professionalism and dedication in the most difficult circumstances. I would also like to thank staff from our local NHS hospitals—Croydon University and St George's—who treated the injured. Without these amazing public servants, more people would undoubtedly have lost their lives.

Croydon Council has set up a centre at Croydon Adult Learning and Training New Addington, on Central Parade, which is being staffed by council officers, the British Red Cross, the Salvation Army, Victim Support, rail care teams, and local church and community groups to provide support, counselling and advice to anybody affected.

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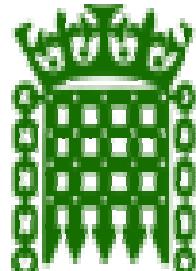
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My officials have participated in the council's recovery co-ordination meetings, and we have offered the Government's help, if that is needed. We stand ready to deal with any requests promptly. People can also obtain help from the Sarah Hope line, which was created to provide specialist support to people affected by fatal or serious injuries on London's transport network. Run by TfL staff, it provides practical, financial and emotional help, and can also make referrals for counselling and specialised support.

The tram was removed from the site in the early hours of Saturday morning and has been transported to a secure location. Work is now under way to repair the damaged track so that tram services can resume as soon as possible.

The RAIB immediately began a major investigation to ensure that the relevant lessons are learned to improve safety and prevent a similar accident from occurring. This investigation is being run independently of, but in parallel with, the British Transport police's investigation, as well as that of the safety regulator, the Office of Rail and Road. The BTP's investigation will consider whether there were any breaches of criminal law. The ORR's investigation will consider whether there were any breaches of health and safety law, which it is responsible for enforcing.

The RAIB intends to publish an initial report into the accident later this week. Its final report will take months to produce, but if urgent safety learning comes to light during the investigation, this will be published without delay. As much as we are all desperate for answers, we need to give the professionals time to do a thorough job. The victims deserve no less.

Our rail and tram services have had a good safety record in recent years. I know I speak for not just the Government but the whole House and the industry when I say we are determined to maintain this. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will give urgent and careful consideration to recommendations as he receives them, and I am confident the industry will do the same.

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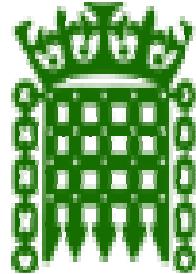
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When we say goodbye to our loved ones each morning, it never crosses our mind that we may not see them again. Seven families are now having to face that terrible reality, and other people will return to their loved ones only after a lengthy stay in hospital and with life-changing injuries. They will need support in the days, weeks and months ahead, and the Government will work with the Mayor of London and Croydon Council to make sure they receive it.

I have made this statement in my capacity as Minister for London, but hon. Members may be aware that the accident took place in my constituency and that six of the seven people who were tragically killed were my constituents. The last few days have been the toughest in my six and a half years as a Member of this House, but I have been sustained by the way in which the people of Croydon have supported the emergency services, as they have carried out their difficult work, and the families and friends of those who lost their lives or were injured. We are a strong community, and we will support each other in our grief.

- Several hon. Members rose—

- Mr Speaker

Order.

Just before I call the shadow Minister, I am most grateful to the Minister for his statement, in terms both of the content and the way in which he delivered it. I feel a duty to inform the House that two commis chefs in the service of the House were among those injured in the tram incident last Wednesday. On behalf of all colleagues, I have written to both to express the hope that they will enjoy a full and, if possible, speedy recovery.

- Hon. Members

Hear, hear!

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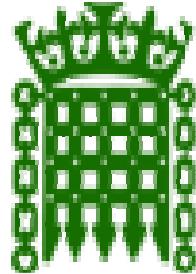
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• Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab)

May I begin by thanking the Minister for London for his statement and for giving me early sight of it? This is the first time we have debated London matters across the Dispatch Box, and I am sorry that it happens under such tragic circumstances. These have been the most difficult days for him and his constituents, and particularly the victims of the derailment—the injured and their families, and the families and friends of the seven people who died. Let me associate myself and everyone on the Opposition side of the House with the Minister's closing words: to lose a loved one is the hardest thing at any time; when disaster strikes from nowhere, and someone is taken away without warning or the chance to say goodbye, it is even harder to bear. The whole House will echo the Minister's thoughts for all who have been touched by this accident and will join him in expressing sympathy for the bereaved.

All Members will, at some point, experience tragic events to which they and their communities have to respond. In my experience, such events bring out the best in all of us and bind us closer in solidarity. They also bring out the best in our emergency services. Let me add my thanks to the London ambulance service, the London fire brigade and the Metropolitan police. Of course, we all know and value our emergency services, but it is at times such as these that we truly comprehend their professionalism and heroism.

Let me turn to the aftermath of the accident. Staff from Transport for London, the NHS, Croydon Council and many other statutory and voluntary bodies have worked, and continue to work, tirelessly to resolve the practical, emotional and physical consequences of the derailment. The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has taken the lead in expressing the sorrow and sympathy of all Londoners at this terrible tragedy. His officers are working closely with Croydon Council to provide immediate specialist help and support for those most affected by the crash.

Finally, let me turn to the investigations into the derailment and the lessons to be learned. We await the reports of the Rail Accident Investigation Branch, the British Transport police and the Office of Rail and

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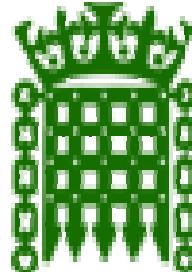
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Road. Clearly, it is too early to expect answers to questions about what caused or contributed to the accident. In any event, there is a criminal investigation under way.

However, I am sure that the Minister will agree that it is imperative that the operator and those conducting the inquiries ensure that even interim findings are translated into immediate action to provide the necessary reassurance that any further such incidents can be averted.

Trams are a very safe form of public transport, but incidents such as this reinforce the fundamental principle that when it comes to our public transport systems, there can never be any compromise on safety. It is essential that the investigations examine whether there were any organisational, as well as individual, errors or omissions that contributed in any way, and whether there was any prior evidence or concern that such an event was possible or likely. In such circumstances, it would be critical to understand why and how any such prior warnings were not recognised and acted on.

There have been calls from some in the transport industry for the introduction of automated braking systems on trams, similar to those used on the docklands light railway. May I ask the Minister to raise that specific matter as part of the inquiries? The Minister may be in a position to say when tram services in Croydon will resume; I believe that there is a test tram running today. In any event, could he say what interim steps will be taken to reassure passengers that this service and similar services around the country—in Nottingham, Sheffield, Edinburgh and Manchester—will be safe to use for the foreseeable future?

• Gavin Barwell

I am hugely grateful for, although not at all surprised by, the tone of the hon. Gentleman's response. It is good to have the support of the Official Opposition for the work that we are undertaking. I have paid tribute to the agencies, but I would like, on a personal level, to thank the Mayor of London for the support that he has provided to Croydon Council and for the detailed briefing that he has ensured that I, as a constituency MP, have had at every stage of the process.

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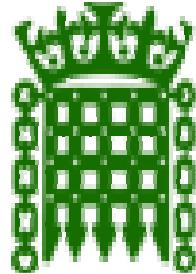
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The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that we should not speculate about the causes of the accident. Three investigations are under way, and it is important that we give the professionals the time to do their work thoroughly. The victims of this terrible tragedy deserve the whole truth, and that will not be served by too much speculation at this stage. I want to reassure him on two points. First, the RAIB has been very clear that if anybody has any evidence—either specific to the accident that took place on Wednesday morning or, more generally, concerns about the operation of the system—it wants to hear that evidence, and I encourage anybody who has such evidence to put it forward. Secondly, the investigation will be very thorough.

The hon. Gentleman asked about automation, and lots of constituents have already raised that issue with me. Essentially, trams are buses on rails. Because they run part of their route on rails and part of it on roads, trams have to rely, at least for part of the route, on drivers driving according to the conditions in front of them. Therefore, trams cannot have the same kind of signalling systems as trains. However, there is a legitimate question about sections of the route where trams run on rails and are akin to trains, and I am sure that that will be one of the issues addressed in the investigation.

The hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that the record of this system over the history of its operation shows that it has been extraordinarily safe. As and when the system reopens, people will obviously be looking for reassurance, but they can look at the safety record and have confidence in that regard. I also give him the assurance he was looking for that if recommendations are made during the course of the RAIB’s work, the Government will of course give them urgent and very careful consideration and make sure that all necessary steps are taken.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that the track has now been repaired and that TfL is running test services today, so I anticipate a decision about when the service can reopen fairly imminently.

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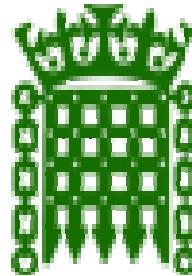
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• Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con)

Communities across Croydon are certainly united in their grief and sympathy for the families of the seven victims. From attending remembrance services in Croydon South yesterday, I know that the hearts of people there have gone out to the families who suffered so tragically on Wednesday. I associate myself with the comments of the Minister and the shadow Minister in paying tribute to the emergency services, who responded so well in very difficult circumstances.

I want to tell the Minister that many of my constituents who also use the line, part of which runs along our constituency border, have contacted me in the past four or five days to say that they have felt in the past—not on Wednesday, but in general—that trains approaching the Sandilands junction from the tunnel to the south have been running at very rapid speeds. Will he confirm to the House that the investigations will cover that? I believe tram users would find it reassuring if there was an opportunity to install either a warning system or automated braking in other trams, as the shadow Minister said, as well as in the ones in Croydon, to prevent any repetition of this accident.

• Gavin Barwell

Like my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour, the Remembrance Day services in Croydon at the weekend obviously took on a special poignancy, with people taking the opportunity to remember those who gave their lives in the past to protect our freedoms in this country, but also those who lost their lives in this tragic accident.

Like my hon. Friend, I have had people contact me with their concerns about the operation of the system over a period of time. I assure him that the investigation will look into those issues. As I said in answer to the shadow Minister, I do not think we should prejudge what needs to happen at this time. Clearly, the investigation will look into such issues, and the Government will take very seriously any recommendations from that investigation.

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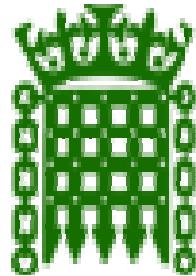
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• Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab)

May I add my condolences to those expressed by the Minister to those who have suffered injury or have lost loved ones in this tragic incident? I reiterate his gratitude to the emergency services, NHS staff—particularly those at the hospital—and the council, whose speedily professionalism undoubtedly saved lives after the incident. Croydon is an extremely tight knit community, and tragedies like the one we have just experienced has brought that community closer together. The shock and sorrow about what has happened has been felt in every part of the borough.

We need the inquiry to conclude as quickly as is reasonably practicable, because once the tram system starts moving again, people will need absolute reassurance that it is safe. Will the inquiry look at other recent incidents on the tram network, such as the impact between a car and a tram near to the Sandilands tram stop a few weeks earlier? That flags up that there have been other incidents that will cause concern to people using the system.

I thank the Minister for the work he has carried out. In conclusion, may I commend the people who have set up a fund to support the victims of this tragedy? Families that have now been hit with funeral expenses may not have the finances at hand to deal with them, and the fundraising that is going on will help to ease the financial strain, which comes on top of the emotional strain they are already suffering.

• Gavin Barwell

The hon. Gentleman, who is a constituency neighbour, is right to draw attention to the work that the council and the Mayor have done in setting up the fund, which will prove invaluable to some of the families. Given the nature of the communities from which they come, some of them will face costs that will be difficult to bear. He is quite right to draw attention to that issue.

I reassure the hon. Gentleman, as I have reassured my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), that the investigation will look at all the evidence on the safety of the system that is drawn to its attention. If constituents contact the hon. Gentleman, I encourage him to direct them to submit such evidence to the inquiry.

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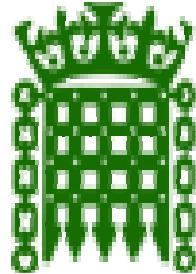
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On the speed of the inquiry, I reiterate that an interim report will be published this week. There may well be issues that the RAIB can draw to the attention of the regulator, the operator and the Secretary of State. Experience suggests that the full report will take 10 to 12 months to produce. However, as I said in my statement, if issues emerge during its work, it is able to make recommendations in the interim. Our constituents should rest assured that any issues that come out of the investigation will be drawn promptly to people’s attention.

• Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)

Many of my constituents travel to or through Croydon, as do I, so we join my hon. Friend in sending our deepest condolences to all those who have been adversely affected. I appreciate that three investigations into the incident are ongoing and must take priority, but a broader concern that constituents have raised with me is the safety and speed of trams at transport interchanges, such as East Croydon station. I wonder whether, at a later date, consideration can be given to those broader safety issues.

• Gavin Barwell

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind words on behalf of his constituents. A number of hon. Members have contacted me over the past four or five days, and I am very grateful for the support they have expressed.

My hon. Friend is right that the tram network, by its nature, runs on rail on parts of the route but also on main roads through the centre of Croydon, where there are clearly risks in relation to motor traffic and pedestrians, including right outside East Croydon station, which is one of the country’s busiest railway stations. Again, I say that if people have concerns, they should draw them to the inquiry’s attention.

The tram system has a very good safety record. My colleagues from Croydon who are in the Chamber will confirm that thousands of our constituents use it to get to work or school every day. It is one of the best things about the town, but everyone will want reassurance that its operation is safe.

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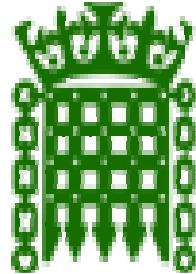
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• Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)

On behalf of the SNP, I pass on our condolences and sympathies to the bereaved families. It was poignant that the Minister said that six of his constituents were among those who were killed. As he said, when we say goodbye to our loved ones in the morning, we expect to see them at night and to spend time catching up on the day, rather than to go through the trauma of what happened. I thank those in the emergency services who were involved.

It is clear that we need to understand what happened. That is why the three investigations are very important. I look forward to the initial interim report of the Rail Accident Investigation Branch. Other Members have touched on the speculation, which is clearly not helpful. Unfortunately, I have read three variations in newspapers, apportioning different types of blame to the driver. That does not help us to get to the bottom of the matter and it does not help the bereaved families. I imagine the Minister will share those concerns.

• Gavin Barwell

The hon. Gentleman touches on one of the most difficult issues with such disasters, which is the media's reporting of them. We all understand and respect the job the media have to do, but I can report that the families of the victims whom I have met have found the media intrusion at a time of terrible grief very difficult to come to terms with. One family sat down to watch the news of the US election, only to see a photo and the identity of their loved one revealed on a TV news bulletin. They had not been told in advance that that was going to happen. I am sure all hon. Members understand how distressing that might be.

We all understand the vital role the media play in our society in disseminating information. It is natural that a day or two afterwards, attention turns to what caused the accident, and that naturally leads one into speculation, but the most important thing is to allow the three investigations to run their course, because

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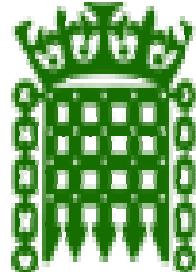
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that is the best way to make sure we get the facts about what caused the accident and understand what each of us needs to do to ensure that it does not recur.

- **Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con)**

I thank my hon. Friend for his statement and for the way in which he has conducted himself, both as a Minister and as a constituency MP, in dealing with this episode. There seems to be a general view that the tram was going too fast at a sharp left-hand bend. Will he reassure the House that the investigators will take advantage of all the international experience in preparing the report, as there are lots of trams around the world? However, I think he and his constituents would be surprised if the final report need take 12 months. Surely, it can be done quicker than that. In a city the size of London, with a growing number of people using the tram network, most people would expect a comprehensive final report well within that 12-month time period.

- **Gavin Barwell**

I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind words. If I may make a generic observation, in my three to four months as a Minister my reaction to nearly everything I have been told has been, “Can’t we do it quicker than that?” I am sure that he is right that most of my constituents would want to see the final report as quickly as possible, exactly as the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) said; none the less, I do not think that it is my job, or our job in this House, to rush people who have a very difficult job to do. On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, I had the opportunity to see just what is involved in gathering the kind of evidence needed for an inquiry of this kind. I have the utmost respect for the work that those individuals are doing.

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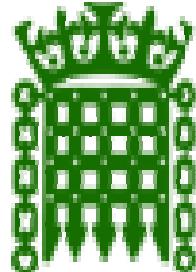
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• Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD)

I thank my friend the Minister for his statement and echo his condolences to the families. I also echo your comments, Mr Speaker, about the members of House of Commons staff affected—I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the Commission, and wish to log my sympathy for what happened to them. I thank the emergency services, the local hospitals, Croydon Council and others who have played a significant part in ensuring that the aftermath of this was addressed properly, and also Transport for London for keeping Members informed. The tramline comes through my constituency of Carshalton and Wallington, and clearly many of my constituents will have been affected.

I wish to make two points. Following on from the point made by the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), I welcome the fact that previous incidents will be looked at as part of this inquiry; perhaps it should look as well as what action happened as a result of those incidents—whether there were technical measures that needed to be taken or training issues that were addressed. Is there a clear mechanism for passengers to report concerns if they believe they are on a tram that is travelling too fast—is it clear what action they can take to ensure that that information is logged somewhere?

• Gavin Barwell

I am very grateful to my friend the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. As he says, part of the network passes through his constituency and there is a long-standing ambition on behalf of the people of Sutton to extend the route down to Sutton town centre, which I am very keen to support—in my constituency capacity, I should hasten to add.

The right hon. Gentleman makes a very good point about previous history. I will add that the operator is required by law to notify the RAIB immediately of any incident that, had circumstances been only slightly different, could have had a serious outcome. I am sure that the investigation will look into whether there have been any notifications of that kind over a period.

Without in any way casting any doubt on the concerns raised with me, as I have felt them myself on the tram,

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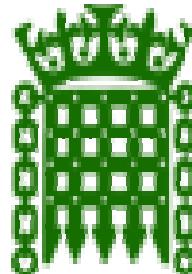
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I would observe that we are not as individuals necessarily the best judges of speed on trams, in particular on this route, which passes through a tunnel where the tram gets up to its top speed before coming to the bend and having to slow down. I am informed that the operator does regular speed checks, so there should be a body of data that will provide good evidence about the record over a period of time. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for drawing that matter to the House's attention.

- **Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab)**

May I associate myself with the eloquent and compassionate words of the Minister and the shadow Front-Bench team, and with your words, Mr Speaker? Will the Minister promise that any learning from this tragedy will be disseminated to all tram networks in the UK and in particular to those of us who have huge tram network infrastructure in our patches?

- **Gavin Barwell**

Those of us who have tram networks in our constituencies are aware of what a fantastic contribution they can make to our transport policies. They are quick, efficient and environmentally friendly modern methods of transport, and I am sure we are all keen for them to be expanded. The Secretary of State for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), and the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), are both sitting alongside me. I am hugely grateful for the support given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in coming down to Croydon on Wednesday to see the scene for himself. I know that they will want to ensure that any lessons that can be learned from this tragic event are applied not just to the Croydon system but to light rail right across the country.

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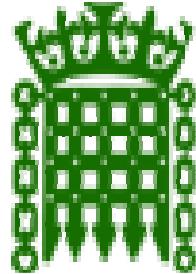
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• Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD)

On behalf of the all-party group on light rail, I would like pay my condolences to all those affected, in particular to the families of those who died and those who were injured, as well as to the whole community and to the Minister, the constituency MP, for the burden he has had to shoulder over these awful few days.

What is particularly shocking about this awful tragedy is that light rail is such a safe form of travel, with 300 million passengers every year. The last passenger killed on a tram in this country had been in 1959. It is clear that this was one incident on one part of track. I am not asking the Minister, in looking at the incident and finding out what went wrong, to speculate on whether there was an engineering error, a human error or both. However, will he assure the House that he will make it clear to colleagues that light rail remains a safe form of travel and encourage his constituents and others to keep using the wonderful tram system that has, on this rare occasion, failed people badly?

• Gavin Barwell

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. He makes a very powerful point. Last year was the ninth consecutive year in which there were no passenger fatalities as the result of an accident such as that we saw last Wednesday in Croydon on any railway in the UK. That was a testament to the hard work of the industry, the regulator and the Government to ensure we learned the lessons from tragic accidents such as Potters Bar, Hatfield and Ladbroke Grove more than a decade ago. He is right to point to the safety record of tram systems across the country overall.

What we need to do now is support the families of the victims of this tragic accident and ensure that the professionals are given the time to carry out their investigations, so that we can learn the appropriate lessons. I think that it is clear from these exchanges that we all share a determination to ensure that our transport systems are safe for the people who use them.

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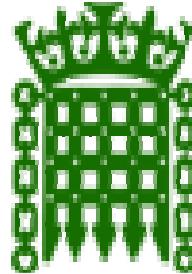
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- Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab)

As I once represented the constituency, may I take this opportunity to express my own deepest sympathy to all those involved?

- Gavin Barwell

I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that expression of sympathy. I think I am right in saying there are six living former Members for my seat, with reflects either its attractiveness as a place to live or its hyper-marginality.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-11-14/debates/303A4AEB-4E23-4735-8860-4793C8A4B55A/CroydonTramIncident#contribution-A1663640-8514-44C1-86A1-2D6269A84F30>

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