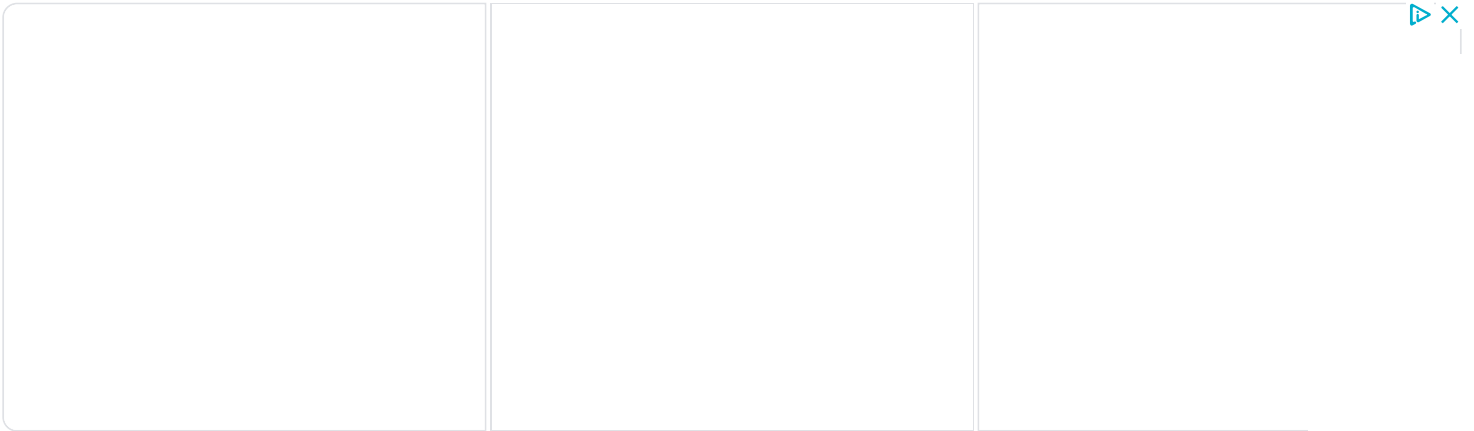


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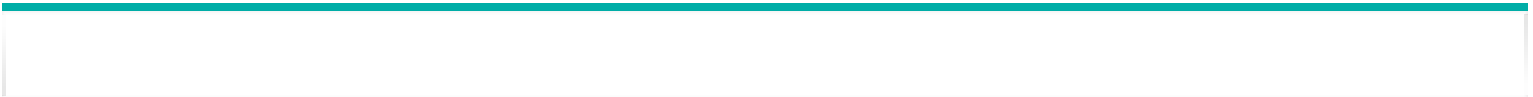


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# Mark Harper – 2023 Speech to Conservative Party Conference

📅 October 2, 2023 👤 admin 💎 2023, 2023 Conservative Party Conference, Mark Harper, Speeches

*The speech made by Mark Harper, the Secretary of State for Transport, in Manchester on 2 October 2023.*

Conference, thank you. It's great to be with you in Manchester and as Transport Secretary, I'm supported by a great ministerial team who join us today: Jesse Norman, Huw Merriman, Richard Holden and Charlotte Vere. I'm proud to lead a team working every day to keep Britain moving forward.

I'd also like to welcome two special guests.

Our newest Member of Parliament, Uxbridge's Steve Tuckwell. Steve's campaign to stop Labour inspired us all.

And also joining us, Susan Hall, the Conservative candidate for Mayor of London, the only person who can defeat Sadiq Khan, cancel his ULEZ expansion, and turn London blue again.

When we arrived in the Department last October, we faced industrial action across our railways.

By March, we'd resolved the dispute at Network Rail, meaning that rail infrastructure is always available, crucial for moving freight.

But the union barons at the RMT and ASLEF have since refused to let their members on train operators have a say on the fair offers on the table.

They don't care how many thousands of pounds their members lose in pay, as long as Mick Whelan still sits on Labour's National Executive Committee, pulling Sir Keir's strings.

That's why Labour refuse to criticise the continued industrial action which achieves nothing but disrupting hardworking businesses and people who just want to get on. They take money from the pockets of ordinary people who could never dream of a train drivers' wage. The union barons seek to inconvenience people, but all they do is risk resentment towards rail workers, and they put their own industry at risk.

Now make no mistake conference, I'm proud of what we Conservatives have done to support our railways.

We've invested over £100 billion to transform services, with millions of passengers across the country travelling on new trains on upgraded tracks. In 13 years, Labour electrified just 63 miles of railway track. We've delivered over 1,200 miles.

The choice is clear: Labour-backed strikes, or Conservative investment.

Either we make the hard but necessary long-term decisions to get a financially sustainable modern railway, or we follow Labour's lazy ideological approach, forking out yet more money from the public purse for no benefit to passengers.

Now conference, for people in my rural constituency, and, indeed, across our country, buses are the backbone of public transport, and this Conservative Government is backing our buses.

We have invested over £3.5 billion in our bus network since March 2020, including over £1 billion to help local areas make bus services more frequent, more reliable, better coordinated, and cheaper.

The evidence is clear. In Labour-run Wales and London, bus fares increased last year. In Scotland, the SNP put them up. In England outside London, thanks to the Conservative fare cap, bus fares actually went down, helping with the cost of living.

In the maritime sector, which carries 95% of UK goods, we are investing to guarantee its sustainable future.

In aviation, with our Jet Zero, we're ensuring we can cut pollution, whilst still growing our economy and helping people go on well-deserved holidays – with the Prime Minister's clear commitment last month to no new punitive taxes that discourage people from flying.

But Conference, for most people, the most important mode of transport remains the car, the van, the lorry, or the motorbike.

From listening to certain corners of the metropolitan bubble, you would think owning a car was immoral, a dirty habit, an optional extra in peoples' lives.

Politicians like Sir Keir Starmer, Sadiq Khan and Mark Drakeford are only interested in the short term, taking the easy way out and making decisions that hammer motorists to seek praise from social media and London newspapers.

It's the Conservative Party which is proudly pro-car. We are on track to a future where zero emission vehicles, powered by batteries, hydrogen or other clean technologies mean we keep driving, but powered in a way that's fit for the future.

And this Conservative Government will make the hard, but necessary long-term decisions to get the country on the right path for the future – even if some people don't like it.

What a contrast with Labour.

In London, Sadiq Khan's ULEZ expansion is a Labour tax on the poorest drivers.

And Conference, he wants to go further. His plans for road pricing would see every driver pay per mile driven, no matter how clean their car is.

And in Labour-run Wales, Sir Keir Starmer's "blueprint for...Labour", there are blanket 20 mile an hour speed limits,

an ideological ban on road building and plans to charge people to drive on the M4. And just last week, they let slip their plans for road charging across Wales.

And it isn't just in Wales or in London. Right across our country, there is a Labour-backed movement to make cars harder to use, to make driving more expensive, and to remove your freedom to get from A to B how you want.

Conference, it is time for Conservatives to act.

And today, I am proud to announce a comprehensive plan to back drivers.

First, I am calling time on the misuse of so-called 15-minute cities. There's nothing wrong with making sure people can walk or cycle to the shops or school. That's traditional town planning.

But what is different, what is sinister, and what we shouldn't tolerate, is the idea that local councils can decide how often you go to the shops, and that they can ration who uses the roads and when, and that they police it all with CCTV.

So today, I am announcing that the Government will investigate what options we have in our toolbox to restrict over-zealous use of traffic management measures including cutting off councils from the DVLA database if they don't follow the rules.

The Prime Minister has already tasked me to conduct a review into Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, and that's ongoing – building on my decision to ensure no Government money funds them.

It can't be right that these schemes are imposed without proper local consent, so we will change the guidance to ensure that councils properly listen to what local people say.

But, Conference, we'll go further.

20 mph zones are a good way to protect schools, for quiet residential streets, or areas that are becoming rat runs. But for some councils, and indeed for some countries, they are yet another way to punish drivers, as blanket measures. The evidence is clear – this makes little difference, may actually increase pollution, and risks motorists ignoring 20mph zones where they are needed.

So, we will change the DfT's guidance, requiring councils to only use 20mph zones where there's a good reason, and underlining that 30mph is the default speed limit on urban roads.

It's also time to put a stop to some councils using unfair fines as a money-spinner.

We will put a stop to councils profiting from traffic offences, clawing back revenue, and removing any temptation to exploit you for profit.

At the same time, we will make it easier for people to switch to cleaner driving in a sensible way, as the Prime Minister set out recently.

There's much more. We will make it easier and cheaper to drive and ride, to park and to use transport sensibly.

To cut down on jams, we'll tune up traffic lights to help junctions flow and restrict 24-hour bus lanes where they aren't appropriate.

And our plan includes a new national parking platform, ending the need to install numerous apps just to park your car as well as a comprehensive package of measures to help councils tackle the menace of potholes.

Now, conference, 36 years ago, Margaret Thatcher inspired a working-class boy from Swindon to join the Conservative Party. And a year later, she told us how we have a "full repairing lease" on our country and on our environment.

Since 2010, Conservatives in Government have worked to deliver her vision.

That working-class boy from Swindon was me, and I make no apology for working to make our transport fit for the future, playing my part in delivering her legacy.

Conference, as a Conservative, I want to give people choice, to make their lives easier, not to force them to travel in a certain way, or at a certain time.

We can make it easier and more convenient for people to use cleaner cars but forcing no one to give up the cars they have today.

We can make it safer for people to choose to walk or cycle, but without forcing drivers off the roads.

And we can cut our carbon emissions without taxing poorer motorists off the roads, or without CCTV-enforced council rationing.

Conference, we are at a fork in the road.

Labour will continue with their same failed approach.

Taxing the poorest motorists.

Political speed limits.

Banning road building.

Labour would put Just Stop Oil in the driving seat, they'd fix a camera on every lamppost, put a hand in every pocket.

Instead, we stand for freedom, to travel how you want. The sensible approach to protecting our environment.

We stand for making the hard, but necessary, long-term decisions to get the country on the right path for the future.

The choice is clear.

We have a long-term plan to back drivers. Labour has a long-term plan to tax drivers. We are on the side of hard-working people; Labour wants to drive them off the roads altogether.

We will take the difficult decisions to put our country on the road to the future, Labour will condemn us to the slow lane.

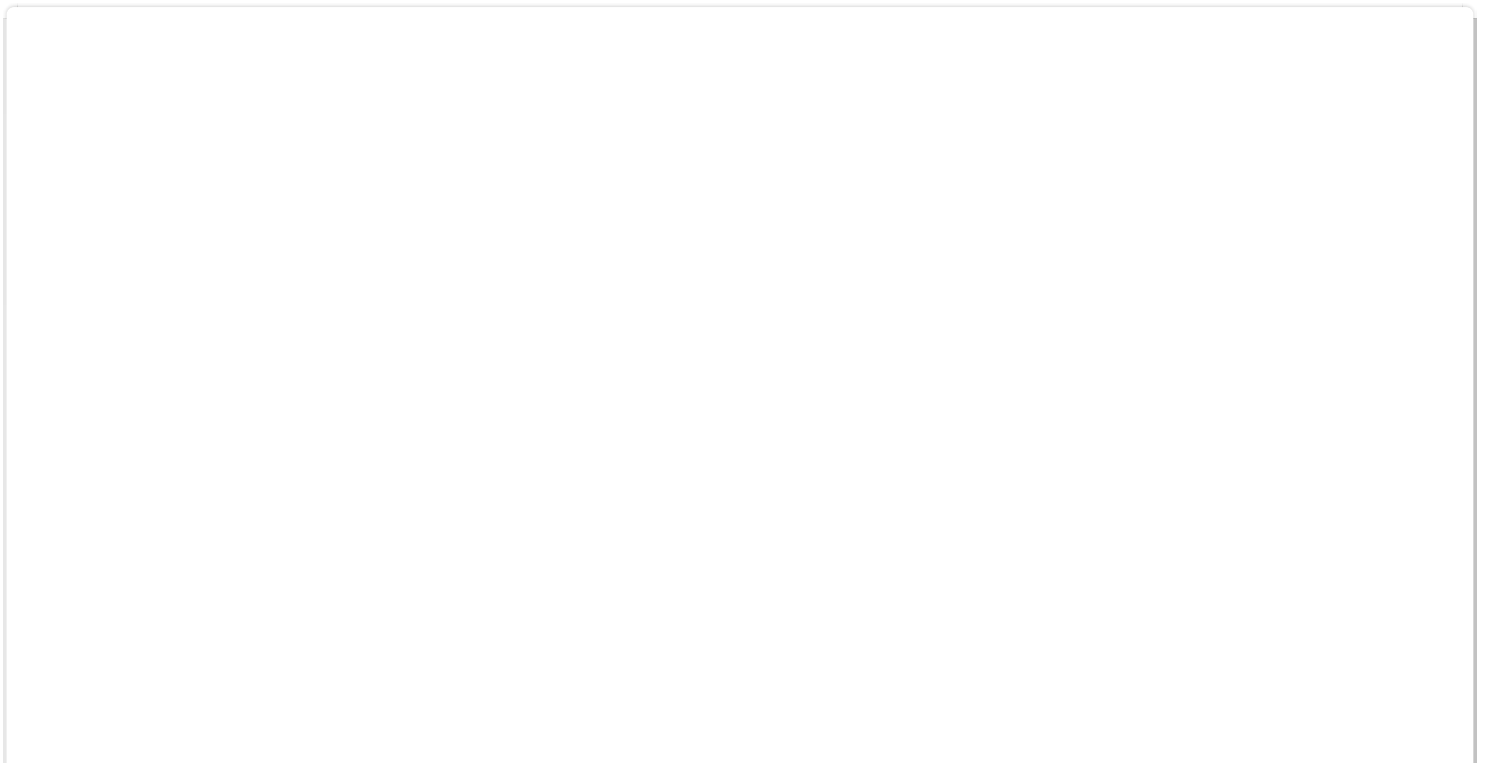
That is why I back Susan Hall in London, Andy Street in the West Midlands, Ben Houchen in the Tees Valley and our fantastic Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, to lead us into the next election and to win.

Conference, thank you very much indeed.

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