

Rt. Hon. Alok Sharma MP
Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

24 May 2020

Dear Alok

At the time of the last economic crisis in 2008 the West Midlands economy was still reeling from the impact on jobs and livelihoods of the collapse of MG Rover three years before. The loss of the factory at Longbridge saw 6,000 jobs directly lost and another 25,000 in the supply chain and supporting sectors.

This event was a brutal reminder of the importance of the automotive industry to the West Midlands and the impact upon the wider economy when it is imperilled.

Rebuilding from this economic shock took years. Yet, rebuild we did. Spearheaded by the transformation of the Coventry head-quartered Jaguar Land Rover, under the ownership and direction of Tata we have seen our flagship employer invest and expand in our region at Castle Bromwich, Solihull and with the opening of the new engine plant at Wolverhampton.

JLR is nationally significant – not least as the biggest investor in R&D in the country and developing its' highly skilled world-class workforce.

Alongside JLR there has been the wider renewal of our automotive sector, including the recent transition into the autonomous and electric sectors.

In the last few years the industry has received vital, targeted financial support from Government to consolidate this revival of the sector, including:

- £500M export guarantee for Jaguar Land Rover
- £126M for the National Battery Industrialisation Centre in Coventry
- £271M for the Manufacturing Technology Centre and Warwick Manufacturing Group
- £40M for autonomous vehicle testing and development

Locally we have striven to support this all-important sector and the jobs upon which it relies by:

- Contributed an additional £18M of Combined Authority funding for the National Battery Centre in Coventry.
- Set up a new £3 million skills fund specifically to help people train and gain new skills in the automotive sector, with further funding available for automotive small businesses from the adult education budget.

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Mayor of the West Midlands

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- Secured funding from Government for two new regional Institutes of Technology at Dudley College and Solihull College.
- Supported 7,000 people take automotive and manufacturing apprenticeships and training courses in the West Midlands in the last two years.
- Led the Transport for West Midlands team which has partnered with automotive experts to test autonomous vehicles on tracks at Horiba Mira in Nuneaton, in the City Centre in Coventry, on the Warwick University campus and on roads around Birmingham, Solihull and Coventry.
- Won the competition for the West Midlands to become the UK's first regional 5G testbed, which will accelerate the development of driverless car technology.
- Begun to roll out electric charging points at Park and Ride sites and install 200 charging points on residential streets partnering with Virgin Media.
- Brought new automotive jobs and investment to the West Midlands, for example 200 new jobs at the new Lotus design and technical centre in Coventry.

Now the industry, its supply chain and the tens of thousands of high-quality jobs which underpin it, face an unprecedented threat to its' survival.

So as local leaders we are writing to ask for Government to move boldly and decisively to support the automotive sector in our region with a comprehensive plan including:

- Targeted financial support for key successful businesses in the sector, exemplified by JLR as the largest, to protect their business viability through this crisis, sustain investment plans in plants (e.g. the planned investment in Castle Bromwich to produce the first electric Jaguar) and secure jobs.
- Work with the sector to ensure that Government schemes are increasingly tailored to their needs, e.g. that the Coronavirus Job Retention (furlough) scheme evolves to enable part-time and shift working that is essential to car plants' operation.
- Copy the Government's drive to restart the housing market by re-opening car showrooms urgently and sending a clear message that the car industry is back in business.
- Ensure we seize the opportunities to consolidate the West Midlands as the home of Britain's green automotive sector by signalling Government support for bringing the UK's first "Gigafactory" to our region for large-scale manufacture of electric battery cells. This would build on the development of the National Battery Centre and would send a powerful message of confidence in the future of the industry. It would become the centrepiece of an evolving cluster of automotive winners.
- Continue to support the drive for a greener, cleaner automotive future through plans like the recently announced fast electric charging points nationwide.

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The West Midlands is the home of Britain's automotive industry and tens of thousands of jobs and livelihoods depend upon its continued success. Therefore, we urge the Government to support the wealth creation and skilled jobs in this sector in the above ways. This needs to be done decisively to ensure the automotive sector has a future as great as its past.

Yours sincerely



Andy Street
Mayor of the West Midlands



Cllr Robert Alden
Conservative Group Leader
Birmingham City Council



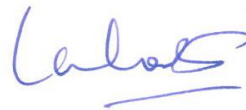
Cllr Gary Ridley
Conservative Group Leader
Coventry City Council




Cllr Patrick Harley
Leader
Dudley Borough Council



Cllr Mike Bird
Leader
Walsall Borough Council



Cllr Ian Courts
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