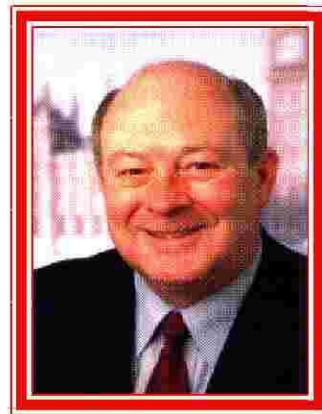


Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

David Clelland MP

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Transport Innovation Fund

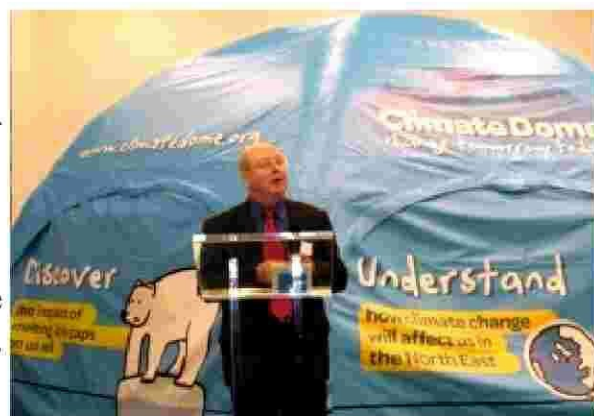


I met with Richard Hibbert, seconded from Newcastle City Council, to carry out our preliminary investigation into ways of reducing road congestion using the government's Transport Innovation Fund (TIF). This is just one facet of the huge problem we face in this region - roads are congested partly because we have an inadequate road network not linked to the UK mo-

torway system and public transport has to be greatly improved before people will willingly leave their cars at home. Meanwhile increased car usage is adding to global warming.....

Launch of Climate Dome

Sponsored by Defra and Scottish Power, the Climate Dome project that I helped launch at the Centre for Life, aims to make the complicated subject of climate change simple, locally relevant and immediate by encouraging people to make small changes to reduce their carbon footprint. The dome will be touring the region bringing the message to as wide an audience as possible.



£600m Bid for Metro Modernisation

I accompanied Transport Authority Chair, Dave Woods, and Nexus chief executive Bernard Garner to Downing Street to present Nexus' 20 year plan for a substantial overhaul and modernisation of the entire Metro system. Efficient and effective transport links are vital to the north eastern economy and if Metro is not refurbished, the cost of lost business, increase in congestion and restrictions on growth and



consequential environment impact will dwarf the amount Metro needs. The system is now 26 years old and in danger of grinding to a halt if major improvements to the infrastructure and rolling stock are not carried out. The message was pressed home when we met Transport Minister Tom Harris. (above, outside No. 10. Right at the presentation in the House of Commons).



Comment

As members will know I have long opposed the introduction of elected members into the **House of Lords** and am very concerned at the proposals announced by **Jack Straw** this week.

The Labour Party manifesto promised to produce a 'modern and effective revising second chamber'. I fully support that commitment. But, what is also crucial is to ensure that the House of Commons remains the supreme legislative assembly in this country. That is a status that is preserved because the second chamber does not have the legitimacy of being elected.

It is perfectly possible to produce a second chamber in line with our manifesto without moving to direct elections. Abolishing hereditary peerages is the first essential step that must be taken, and in itself would make the Lords more democratic. The responsibility for nominating members should be extended beyond the Prime Minister of the day alone, perhaps to devolved assemblies, local government, business, unions etc. and a statutory appointments commission should ensure that nominations would produce a balanced chamber in terms of geography, gender, ethnic origin, religion etc and that no political party has an overall majority. This would produce a second chamber with the knowledge, expertise and experience to do the job of scrutiny, revision and deliberation that will add value to our system of governance. It is not possible in a directly elected system to ensure such broad and balanced representation.

I was never wildly enthusiastic about a **super-casino** in Newcastle, although I appreciated the benefits of the conference facilities that went with it. I could have understood the casino going to Black-

pool, desperately in need of this kind of regeneration, or even docklands. But Manchester?

It's just another example of how things go horribly wrong when Ministers abrogate their responsibilities and farm decision making out to 'apolitical' bodies.



Parliament

I was lucky enough to be drawn in the ballot for **questions to the Prime Minister** on 7th February. It is always difficult to decide what point to make with so much going on. In the end I decided to press the point about the need to improve the Metro system as a necessary element in radically improving our regional transport infrastructure.

As I reminded the PM, Metro plays an important part in pursuing government policies on reducing congestion, stimulating local economies, fighting climate change and promoting social cohesion.

The Prime Minister acknowledged the importance of Metro to life on Tyneside and promised that the business case submitted to the Department of Transport would receive the serious consideration it merits.

Since the last meeting, Statements in the House have included the one on **House of Lords Reform**, the **criminal records backlog**, the **BBC Licence Fee** and, of course, the announcement of which city won the **super-casino**.

Legislation has included the Second Reading of the **Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill**, the **Digital Switch-over (Disclosure of Information) Bill**, the introduction of the **UK Borders Bill**, the Second Reading of the **Income Tax Bill**.

There was also the remaining stages of the **Fraud (Trials without a Jury) Bill**. Forget Henry Fonda in 'Twelve Angry Men' - this Bill was simply to enable the most serious and complex fraud trials to be heard by a judge alone, about half a dozen cases in the 30,000 or so heard each year.

The Commons also heard, and agreed, a **Ten Minute Rule Bill**, the culmination of a campaign which I support, that seeks annual monitoring and reports to Parliament so that we can all see what steps are being taken to address the effects of climate change.

I have attended meetings with representatives from the **Passenger Transport Executive Group (PTEG)**, the **Tyne and Wear Museums, Libraries and Archives Service**, **Remploy**, the **Club Union movement** and the **Showman's Guild**. I also met with a representative of **Gateshead Citizens Advice Bureau** at a reception in the House.



Constituency

My usual constituency advice surgeries have been held.

I was able to welcome - separately - both the **Prime Minister** and International Development Secretary **Hilary Benn** to the constituency.

The Prime Minister came to Gateshead Civic Centre to help launch in connection with a new college course for councillors leading to an accreditation. (it won't be long before you need a degree to represent your community), and Hilary Benn met with Party members in pursuance of his bid to become Deputy Leader of the Labour Party.