KEEPING THE UK MOVING
The impact on transport of the winter weather in December 2010

More can and should be done to ensure UK transport networks continue to operate in severe weather, said British Members of Parliament in a report issued on 12th May. The welfare of air and rail passengers must be taken more seriously and better real time information must be provided to road users.

Launching a report examining how snow chaos last December closed Heathrow, disabled parts of the rail network and disrupted many roads, Transport Committee Chairman, Louise Ellman MP (Labour/Co-operative Liverpool Riverside) said, “It is clear that Heathrow airport was totally unprepared to recover from any major incident which necessitated its closure and that its owners underinvested in winter resilience equipment. Every airport operator must now be pushed to plan properly for bad weather so that people are not left stranded and without even basic supplies in airport terminals for days on end. As Professor Begg has suggested, we believe airport managers must develop effective Passenger Welfare Plans. A culture change in the rail industry is needed to ensure that passengers are looked after during periods of disruption. In future, any failure to provide information about service disruption during severe weather should cost the firms responsible money. The strategic salt arrangement introduced a year ago clearly kept many main roads open last December. The Highways Agency and police forces must however work to manage blockages on the strategic road network more proactively, making greater use of roadside and in-car information systems to warn motorists about poor conditions and disruption. Ministers must also look again at the resources available to the Met Office. Given the huge cost of winter weather disruption to the economy – some £280 million per day in transport disruption alone – the £10 million suggested by the Secretary of State would be a small price to pay to improve the Met Office’s long range forecasting capability.”

In its report the House of Commons Transport Committee has called for additional investment and co-ordination by government to:

- Ensure the final version of the Department for Transport’s Climate change Adaptation Plan refers to the future risk of severe winter weather.

- Improve resilience of the third rail network south of the Thames, with a long term aim to install a more resilient method of electrification.
• Oversee airport planning for major incidents including snow chaos, particularly at Heathrow and review airport regulations to ensure they take account of this.

• Permit airport operators to reclaim the cost of looking after stranded passengers when airlines fail to discharge their responsibility to do this.

• Provide better online advice for individuals and communities about tackling problems arising from severe winter weather.

• Launch a high profile campaign to increase the proportion of motorists taking precautions for driving in winter weather.

• Develop clearer snow and ice risk travel warnings for freight vehicles similar to those for strong winds.

• Investigate the case to provide the Met Office with more money to improve its long range forecasting capability sufficient to improve the way transport operators can warn passengers.