



Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
House of Commons
London SW1A 1AA

6 July 2020

Dear Chancellor

Felixstowe to Nuneaton Strategic Rail Corridor

We write to you as chairs of three Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) to voice our strong support for the ongoing programme of capacity enhancements on the internationally important *Felixstowe to Nuneaton* rail corridor. We also bring to your attention key component projects on the cross-country route that we will work with Government, Network Rail and our sub-national partners to deliver to support national economic recovery and growth.

The *Felixstowe to Nuneaton* strategic rail corridor plays an increasingly fundamental role in driving the UK's international trade, providing the main strategic rail link for freight between the ports in the East and the Midlands, the North and Scotland.

The corridor is the UK's highest priority rail freight corridor and supply chain, directly supporting trade with the rest of the world. Seventy per cent of containers that arrive at Felixstowe - the UK's busiest deep-water port - are delivered to Midlands, Manchester, Liverpool and Yorkshire, with demand forecasted to rise. Our three STBs are committed to shifting this freight from road to rail.

Enhancing capacity on this route will not only increase freight capacity, but also unblock passenger rail services that travel from our regions to London, the North and Scotland. Corridor enhancements will also enable non-London bound rail freight from the Eastern ports to avoid the need to travel through the capital, and create new rail opportunities, such as the East West Rail Main Line from East Anglia to Oxford.

We strongly welcome the ongoing commitment from Network Rail to unblock the strategic corridor via Ely, and endorse the local work progressing to tackle pinch-points, including at Haughley and Leicester, and sections between Ely and West Suffolk.

The **Haughley Junction** project located in Suffolk will double-track the intersection between the Great Eastern Main Line and the Felixstowe to Nuneaton corridor, unlocking cross-country freight paths travelling via Ely and passenger services that travel along the Great Eastern Main Line to London. The priority of this work is demonstrated by the unprecedented £1m local contribution from Suffolk's Leaders and

our three STBs strongly endorse the imminent request to Government to proceed to Design phase this summer.

Between Leicester and Haughley, **Ely Junction** is the congested interchange of north-south and east-west freight and passenger routes which dictates the capacity of the entire route, and we strongly support the progression of the Ely Junction improvements to Outline Business Case this summer as a core component of the plans to unlock the congested strategic rail link through Ely Station and north of Ely Station. Alongside this, the section of track from Ely to **Chippenham Junction in West Suffolk** - including a single line section between Ely and Soham Junction - represents a further pinch-point, causing delays and constraining capacity for the growth of cross-country freight and East-West passenger rail services. Local partners are working with Network Rail to understand and progress the improvements needed.

In the **Leicester area**, Network Rail is currently leading a Continuous Modular Strategic Planning study to unlock the bottleneck around Leicester. As this work progresses, Midlands Connect propose to develop a business case for interventions to address the capacity challenges at Leicester, allowing strategic freight and passenger services to grow as part of the wider Midlands Engine Rail programme.

Progressing these projects alongside a longer-term programme for the Felixstowe to Nuneaton corridor would directly support the economic goals in Local Industrial Strategies, as well as the Government's vision in the National Infrastructure Delivery Plan for world class train services that drive economic growth, and importantly support the decarbonisation of the transport system.

We will continue to support Network Rail, our local partners and Government to build on the excellent work taking place between Felixstowe and Nuneaton, and help progress the next phases of strategic work on this corridor aligned to our broader STB transport strategies, supporting the potential of the UK rail network to fully support local, sub-national and national low-carbon economic recovery and growth.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Kevin Bentley
Chair of Transport East



**Mayor Dave
Hodgson**
**Chair of England's
Economic Heartland
Strategic Transport
Forum**



Sir John Peace
**Chair of Midlands
Connect**