



englandseconomicheartland@buckscc.gov.uk

Programme Office
c/o Buckinghamshire County Council
County Hall
Walton Street
Aylesbury
HP20 1UA

The Planning Inspectorate
National Infrastructure Planning
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Avon
Bristol
BS1 6PN

Sent by email: NorthamptonGateway@pins.gsi.gov.uk

22 October 2018

Dear Sir/Madam,

NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING – NORTHAMPTON GATEWAY RAIL FREIGHT INTERCHANGE

England's Economic Heartland established the Strategic Transport Forum in February 2016. Membership of the Forum covers the area from Swindon, through Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes and across to Cambridgeshire, and from Northamptonshire across to Luton and Hertfordshire.

The Strategic Transport Forum is the emerging Sub-national Transport Body for the Heartland region. It is the focus for a single conversation on strategic transport issues and maintains the overview of strategic investment priorities. The Forum works closely with the Department for Transport, Highways England and Network Rail, all of whom are members of the Forum.

Strategic Context

The National Infrastructure Commission's (NIC) has identified the economic potential of the Heartland area as being of national significance to the long term future of the UK economy. The Interim Report identified the potential to increase the value of the corridor's economy by between £85bn and £163bn over the next 30 years. The Commission identified improved connectivity as being one of two critical issues that needs to be addressed in order to realise that opportunity.

The Government's response to the NIC in the Budget (2017) endorsed the Commission's view of the national significance of realising the economic potential of the Heartland area.



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England's Economic Heartland in its role as an emerging Sub-national Transport Body recognises the benefits associated with hauling goods by rail, promoted through National Planning Policy and Government's Rail Freight Strategy. We recognise that rail freight can have a positive impact on the environment, reliability, economy and increased access to consumer goods. We believe these benefits are best realised when taken forward concurrently with improvements to passenger needs, including enhanced services and better connectivity.

This letter seeks to address these principles by providing examples of the Heartland's strategic rail priorities intrinsically linked to capacity on the West Coast Main Line.

Response to consultation

England's Economic Heartland welcomes the opportunity to make representation to the Examining Authority overseeing the application for Development Consent on behalf of Northampton Gateway Rail Freight Interchange. Key to the success of the Heartland's economy is the need to ensure Nationally Significant Transport Infrastructure schemes in the Heartland harness the area's existing strategic transport priorities as part of their examination and are planned with due consideration to the wider economic growth aspirations of the corridor.

The National Policy Statement for National Networks sets out the minimum requirements for a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange. In terms of scale and design this includes, at a minimum, the need to handle four trains per day and where possible capable of increasing the number of trains handled. It is reassuring that this requirement, at least in principle, has been satisfied by Network Rail with further design/operational detail being sought during examination, applying an iterative process to specification.

The design and functionality of the interchange is of key significance to EEH. Understanding the volume of freight and how it will be accepted onto the track is core to the success of our strategic rail priorities. The line speed of new freight trains, including in and out of the interchange, their length, slots/paths and origin/destination of cargo has the potential to add additional constraints to a rail corridor experiencing capacity challenges recognised by DfT and Network Rail.

This need to preserve future line capacity is key to the delivery of forthcoming connectivity opportunities associated with East-West Rail. The delivery of East-West Rail as a project, both the Western and Central section, remains England's Economic Heartland's key rail priority going forward. Delivery of East West Rail infrastructure, in combination with the opening of HS2 (providing relief to the current West Coast Main Line) provides the opportunity to improve connectivity along an axis which hosts a number of key economic and housing areas.



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Both Network Rail and England's Economic Heartland have identified the strategic importance of the Northampton – Milton Keynes – Aylesbury – High Wycombe – Old Oak Common axis and the opportunities this will bring. East West Rail will be a catalyst for this link, thus we would welcome a degree of assurance from the DfT or Network Rail that, where additional freight services infringe on the existing capacity, this is met by an offer of increased investment to ensure through services on the Northampton – Old Oak Common axis are delivered post HS2 opening.

It is pertinent to mention that the proposed design of East-West Rail will retain the ability to accommodate existing rail freight. We are confident that new infrastructure delivered within Phase 2 is designed to accommodate additional freight in the form of the heaviest trains with the maximum wagon length. This aspiration is being taken forward by East-West Rail Consortium and local authorities, supported in the Mayor's Transport Strategy. This Strategy has committed to establish ways non London rail freight can be taken around the capital (where more capacity is available and demand for passenger services is lower).

England's Economic Heartland are working with its Delivery Partners to plan for the most efficient way of providing access to goods that unlocks economic potential, protects the environment and future-proofs the network for the benefit of everyone. A study into freight is analysing the potential for modal shift of container and bulk goods by rail, reviewing the role of interchanges and potentially identifying gaps in provision for future ones. We are happy to establish a dialogue and share data outputs from this work with you should it be of interest.

Finally, at the time of writing, we are aware that a proposal for a second Strategic Rail Freight Interchange adjacent to the site of Northampton Gateway has not been accepted for examination. Should the applicant decide to resubmit, and the application is accepted for examination, we recommend that the cumulative impacts of the two proposals are considered jointly (where possible to do so). This would ensure the net effect of both interchanges would be better understood, as these implications have an impact on the rail capacity referred to above, and provide insight into the wider effects on the strategic road network including the M1 (Junction 15a) and the A43.

England's Economic Heartland appreciate your time in considering this letter during the examination phase and we would be happy to provide further comments or answer any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,

Antony Swift

**Project Lead
October 2018**