

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

EEH Business Unit  
c/o Buckinghamshire Council  
Walton Street  
Aylesbury  
HP20 1UA

5<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Dear Chancellor,

### **WESTERN RAIL LINK TO HEATHROW**

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) brings together political and business leaders in a pan-regional strategic partnership, one that has a specific focus on the planning, development and delivery of strategic infrastructure. In that role it is the Sub-national Transport Body for the Heartland region.

Its membership stretches from Swindon to Cambridgeshire and from Northamptonshire to Hertfordshire, and includes the area identified by Government as the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Initiative.

Our draft Transport Strategy sets out a bold framework for achieving the requirement for net-zero carbon in a way that delivers economic and inclusive growth. The strategy identifies Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH) as an essential scheme and it is within this context that we write to you advocating the need to commit to funding and accelerating its delivery.

As a scheme WRLtH is:

- A fully developed and costed project, capable of rapid delivery subject only to planning and final funding approval
- Transformational – bringing substantive improvement in connectivity to 14 million people across multiple regions and so delivering improved competitiveness and productivity, inward investment and business growth and retention
- A levelling-up project – serving and supporting regional economies in the South West, South Wales, South Central, South East and Midlands including regions forecast to suffer disproportionately badly from the impact of COVID-19
- A carbon reduction project – delivering UK climate change targets and mitigating the impact of Heathrow
- A vital stimulus to the UK aviation industry nationwide
- An important facilitator in the recovery of freight, tourism and universities
- A project that offers value for money, with well-evidenced Return on Investment to Government and business.

EEH's support for WRLtH is predicated on the existing and future demand associated with a two-runway airport. Subsequently, any future expansion of Heathrow taken forward by a third-runway only serves to strengthen the case for investment, but should by no means be considered a pre-requisite for delivery of the project. The WRLtH project must proceed to enable Heathrow and government to ensure transport pledges and environmental commitments in respect of surface access are met and thereby support the more effective use of Heathrow's two existing runways.

The benefits of providing west-facing direct rail access from the Great Western Main Line to Heathrow Terminal 5 presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enhance the region's economic geography and deliver significant decarbonisation gains. A new connection via Reading will serve as the catalyst from which new market catchments on the periphery of the airport can emerge, benefiting from faster journey times by rail into Europe's busiest airport. In addition to the uplift in local connectivity from South Buckinghamshire, the strategically important economies of Oxford and Swindon will be brought within one hour of the airport by public transport, which is essential for foreign direct investment. Further, the key towns of Bicester and Banbury will benefit from quicker, cleaner journeys to the airport via interchange at Reading.

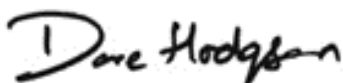
These substantial journey time savings create the optimum conditions to attract inward investment to the west of the Heartland, which in-turn will generate wider agglomeration and productivity benefits. The delivery of East-West Rail coupled with WRLtH will support new corridors of connectivity between the north of our region and Heathrow. A direct connection via WRLtH to Reading, north through to Oxford/Bicester coupled with the delivery of the Western Section of East-West Rail presents a new connectivity axis for the counties of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire.

The impetus to deliver environment net-gain and the legal obligation to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 must be used as a catalyst for a new paradigm in our transport system. In this vein, the environmental benefits associated with the WRLtH scheme are far reaching. The modal shift from road to rail will provide much needed relief for London Paddington (and other London termini) and resilience of the rail network more generally. It will reduce congestion on the strategic road network, such as the M4, M40 and M25. In doing so improving air quality and reducing levels of CO2 nationally.

EEH's understanding is that the scheme continues to receive support from all the benefitting regions following extensive engagement and statutory consultation undertaken in 2018. It is the view of the Forum that both enabling works and mitigation of the construction impact on the local highway network, funded and delivered through Slough Borough Council and Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership, reflects the importance of delivering this scheme in a timely, but compliant way.

EEH is acutely aware of the complexities regarding capital funding to enable DCO submission and we fear that delays are growing when it comes to moving this scheme forward. Given the identified need this project addresses and its advanced stage of development we urge government to give a swift and firm commitment to delivering WRLtH as part of its commitment to drive a green, economic recovery. An early decision will instil confidence in investors, businesses and trading partners, stimulating the UK aviation industry and our internationally world-leading universities; essential for UK plc in the wake of this recovery.

**Yours sincerely,**



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