



Friday 15 February 2013

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Dear sir/madam,

**Re: Opportunity to comment on Network Rail's strategic business plan for control period 5**

I am writing to you in my capacity as lead for the Western Rail Access to Heathrow (WRAtH) project on behalf of Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership, and as chair of the WRAtH Stakeholder Steering Group\*. We welcome the opportunity to comment on Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan for England and Wales (SBP), Western Route Summary Route Plan (WRSRP) and Industry Strategic Business Plan England and Wales (ISBP).

Over the past few years the promoters of WRAtH have been successful in raising awareness of the project benefits for passengers, businesses and the rail industry. These are as a result of reduced journey times, improved connectivity, increased reliability, additional economic activity, congestion alleviation and environmental benefits. (For more information see <http://thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk/wrauth/wrauth-benefits/>).

As part of awareness raising work, a number of responses have been submitted to consultations around the future development of the rail network and the aviation sector. WRAtH has subsequently been included in Network Rail Route Plans (2009), Route Utilisation Strategies (2010, 2011), HM Treasury's National Infrastructure Plan (2011), High Level Output Specification (2012) and Draft Aviation Policy Framework (2012).

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\* WRAtH Stakeholder Steering Group (SSG) comprises representatives from TVB LEP; Heathrow Airport Ltd; Network Rail; London Heathrow airlines consultative committee; First Great Western with the purpose of supporting the industry in the delivery of the project

We are therefore delighted to see enhanced connections to ports and airports feature so prominently in the suite of documents produced (SBP, p47. WRSRP p4, 30, 34 & 101. ISBP p42). WRAtH proposals have arisen as a result of demands for improved rail access to Heathrow by businesses and passengers to deliver greater reliability, shorter journeys and to mitigate the impacts of the airport on local communities.

We wholeheartedly support the CP5 priorities outlined below in delivering an integrated transport network which works for users and local communities alike. It is important that the industry recognises the requirements of passengers and businesses in building and operating the network, and as a Stakeholder Steering Group promoting WRAtH we see our role as one which will ensure the investment allocated results in the best possible outcome for tax payers.

**“The Government’s strategy for CP5 on Western Route is built around four priorities which comprise:**

**Priority 4 Improving railway links to major ports and airports through a new rail link to give Western access to Heathrow Airport.”**

*Western Route, Summary Route Plan, p30*

**“By 2019, A railway by the end of CP5 that:**

- **Delivers continuing improvements in customer satisfaction**
- **Delivers a step change in connectivity**
- **Transforms the nature of the rail network, with...completion of major enhancements”**

*ISBP, p6*

There are a number of specific points included within the documents particularly relevant to the project which are highlighted below.

**“The aim of the rail industry is to place the railway at the centre of a transport system which drives economic growth” through “enhancing the capacity and the capability of the railway”** *SBP for England and Wales, January 2013. p1*

**“Rail is best placed to respond to growth, as economic and environmental trends in the market play to rail’s core strength of moving large volumes of good and passengers over long distances, and between and into city centres and international gateways”** *Industry Strategic Business Plan England and Wales, p3*

We are encouraged to see economic growth placed at the centre of infrastructure investment, especially the railways, in the forthcoming Control Period. From its conception WRAtH has been driven by a desire to safeguard and grow the economy of the Thames Valley and the wider UK. As the most productive region outside of London, contributing around £30 billion to the national economy each year, it is vital that the prosperity of the Thames Valley is safeguarded through ongoing investment in infrastructure.

Heathrow is a major contributor to the regions economic success story, and as is acknowledged in section 5.5.1 of ISBP there is growing demand from the business sector for connectivity to be improved in a globalised business environment. WRAtH will not only make the beneficiary region more attractive to new investment, but offers an additional reason for businesses to reflect more positively on their current locations when taking long term investment decisions. This is something I am acutely aware of in my role as Chief Executive of Slough Borough Council, in close proximity to Heathrow Airport and home to a host of national and international businesses.



We would also wholeheartedly support seamless transition between funding and control periods, as there has been some frustration at the slow pace of progress on the project to date. Following the announcement of up to £500m of funding for the project in July 2012 we have been keen to see maintained momentum but only recently have specific next steps been outlined. Again while we appreciate that a business case and due diligence has to be carried out to avoid abortive costs this is not a reason for breaks in the process in between stages. We are in dialogue with Network Rail about possible ways of reducing these delays, for example reducing delays arising from funding uncertainty, and for this reason welcome the acknowledgement in the SBP to work to avoid this in future.

While it may seem that we are preoccupied with the delivery date this is only because figures show that 17 million<sup>2</sup>