

Strategic Transport Forum 22nd June 2018

Agenda Item 4c: Western Rail Access to Heathrow Consultation

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Forum agree the consultation response (Annex 1) subject to any amendment agreed by the Forum.

1. Context

- 1.1. Network Rail is undertaking a pre-application consultation in support of the proposed Western Rail Access to Heathrow.
- 1.2. In responding to the London Mayor's draft Transport Strategy (September 2017) the Forum agreed that improved public transport access to Heathrow Airport was a strategic priority. The Forum identified that any proposal to expand Heathrow Airport needs to demonstrate how the surface access networks will be invested in to accommodate additional demand.
- 1.3. The Forum also supported the London Mayor's proposal to seek a commitment from Government to fund and deliver the transport measures required to support the expansion of Heathrow Airport. Delivery of the proposed Western Rail Access to Heathrow scheme was specifically identified as one such measure.

2. Response

- 2.1. Deadline for responses to the consultation is 22 June. The consultation provides the Forum with the opportunity to restate its support for this strategically important scheme.
- 2.2. A draft response on behalf of the Forum (Annex 1) has been prepared by officers from Buckinghamshire County Council.
- 2.3. The Forum is asked to agree the draft response – subject to any amendment identified by the meeting.

Martin Tugwell
Programme Director

June 2018

**WESTERN RAIL ACCESS TO HEATHROW (WRLtH)
DRAFT - CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance established the Strategic Transport Forum in February 2016. Membership of the Strategic Alliance 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) Interim Report of November 2016 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 value of the Heartland economy (currently £92.5bn per annum) increasing by between £85bn and £163bn over the next 30 years. The Commission identified improved connectivity as being one of two critical issues that needed 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 as to the national significance of realising the economic potential of the Heartland area. This Highways England consultation reassuringly states that in setting RIS2 the NIC findings will be taken account of generally and through studies of specific infrastructure needs, including the Oxford to Cambridge growth corridor. In this context we support the the Department for Transport's request to Network Rail to bring forward a scheme to link Heathrow airport by rail directly to the Western Main Line. Importantly, and if we may say not fully considered in the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (Section 1.3, Objectives of the Proposed Scheme) is how the connection to Reading opens up direct Heathrow links for Swindin, Oxford and Bicester. Looking further ahead to when the scheme would be operational in 2027 the enhanced network via Reading would provide a direct rail option via the East West Rail (Western Section) to north Buckinghamshire, Aylesbury via the Aylesbury Spur, Milton Keynes, Northampton and Bedford. The Strategic Transport Forum supports the Government's decision – most recently in the draft Airports National Policy Statement laid before Parliament - that identifies Heathrow Airport as the preferred location for providing additional runway capacity in the London airport system.

The Forum in its role as emerging Sub-national Transport recognises the important role which Heathrow and perhaps more essentially the airport's surface connectivity plays in the economies of the Heartland. The Forum would want to work with Network Rail to ensure that additional investment in the rail and multi modal transport network in and through the Heartlands to improve productivity of the UK enables the required step change in access to the airport, increasing the range, capacity and resilience of sustainable transport options for passengers, workers, business and freight.

Response to consultation

The Strategic Transport Forum welcomes the opportunity to submit its views on Network Rail's pre application proposals for the design of WRLtH. The Forum considers, irrespective of the success of Heathrow in bringing its proposal for a third runway, that the WRLtH project should proceed to enable Heathrow and government to fulfill transport pledges and environmental commitments and so support the more effective use of Heathrow's two existing runways.

The Forum endorses Heathrow's financial support for WRLtH. Delivery of this investment should be prioritised as a matter of urgency in support current operations at Heathrow Airport. Improved connectivity by rail into the wider Thames Valley will support business activity and encourage future investment. It is therefore of strategic importance in enabling the economic potential identified by the National Infrastructure Commission to be realised.

A direct link via WRLtH to Reading, Swindon and to Oxford, Bicester, Milton Keynes and further north and east within the Heartlands area and south to Aylesbury can then be provided when the East West Rail (Western Section) is completed as set out by the Secretary of State in his evidence to the Transport Select Committee on 7 February 2018. The Secretary of State advised the Committee that " I expect western rail access to begin construction in CP6 and to conclude before the opening of the runway." The Forum supports the wider connectivity goals of Network Rail and Heathrow and in particular to provide direct public transport access to the main towns and cities in the country. Rail connections via East West Rail and WRLtH to Heathrow could provide a direct links with Oxford, Aylesbury, Milton Keynes, Bletchley and Bedford. We would ask that in taking forward the assessment of the scheme these wider connections are set out, for example, through updates to Tables 1.1 and 1.2 (PEIR, Volume 2). This would show the provision of new direct routes for the Heartlands area and the journey time saving compared to current services via Paddington, Marylebone, Euston, St Pancras and Kings Cross.