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WELLAND VALLEY RAIL PROJECT – LETTER OF SUPPORT

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) brings together political and business leaders in a pan-regional strategic partnership, with a focus on the planning, development and delivery of strategic infrastructure. It is the Sub-national Transport Body for the 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.

EEH's Transport Strategy identifies and recommends the region's infrastructure requirements that are essential to lead a green economic recovery whilst meeting the requirement for net-zero carbon as early as possible. Heavy rail is well placed to deliver these imperatives by virtue of it being a lower-carbon intensive way of moving high volumes of people over medium/long distances. Realising rail's potential requires both investment in decarbonising the rolling stock and investment in the network to address infrastructure gaps where strategic connectivity gaps exist.

Whilst we can be confident that a pathway to end the direct emissions of greenhouse gases from trains has been mapped out by Network Rail's Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy, the need to bring forward additional investment in infrastructure must remain a Government priority. As such, EEH encourages the Department for Transport to develop subsequent rounds of its Restoring your Railway fund and that it should look to the Sub-national Transport Bodies, with their evidence led, outcome focused strategies as providing an appropriate context within which proposals should be brought forward.

It is in the context of the region's Transport Strategy that EEH is writing to place on record its support for the Welland Valley Rail Project proposal. EEH's collaboration with Network Rail over recent years has identified how the region's sparse level of east/west connectivity acts as a constraint on realising our socio-economic potential and the ability of residents to make sustainable journeys between key settlements. Whilst the delivery of the East West Main Line Rail provides the over-riding transformational opportunity to address this, further improvements in east-west connectivity will be required if we are to deliver on our agreed strategic outcomes. It is in this context that our Transport Strategy identifies the strategic importance of a northern rail corridor that links north Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough.

Reconnecting the communities of Kettering, Corby, and Stamford through to Peterborough by reinstating the former railway line will provide a fast strategic connection between key urban centres already identified as the focus for planned growth. In addition, restoration of the connectivity between the Midland Main Line and East Coast Main Line will enable wider benefits to be realised across the region.

The economies of Kettering, Corby and Peterborough are identified within the Transport Strategy as places of strategic importance. Connecting these towns/cities through the provision of fast, regular rail services will agglomerate a series of functional labour/employment markets into a better connected region. The schemes' ability to offer faster journey times by rail compared with car/bus creates a viable and attractive alternative to the

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private car and in doing so will deliver environmental and social outcomes for people and places located along this corridor.

We recognise that a connection between the Felixstowe- Nuneaton corridor and the Midland Main Line (by restoring the connection between Peterborough-Kettering) represents a strategic opportunity to reroute freight trains serving Corby and destinations further south on the Midland Main Line. Improving strategic connectivity in this way will enable existing freight flows to avoid the need to transit via London, a strategic outcome that is a shared ambition of both EEH and the Greater London Authority.

The Welland Valley Rail Project has a strong strategic fit with the ambitions and policies set out by the region's political and business leaders and would accelerate a green recovery at the regional level. We encourage decision makers to take this is account in the decision making process and we are happy to discuss this proposal further.

Mayor Dave Hodgson

**Chair, Strategic Transport Forum
England's Economic Heartland**

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