

Aviation Strategy
Department for Transport
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

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

10th October 2017

Dear Sir,

AVIATION STRATEGY: 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 Oxfordshire, through Milton Keynes and across to Cambridgeshire, and from Northamptonshire across to Luton.

The Strategic Transport Forum is the emerging Sub-national Transport Body for the Heartland area.

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 response to the National Infrastructure Commission in the Autumn Statement 2016 endorsed the Commission's view as to the national significance of realising the economic potential of the Heartland area.

The Government's Aviation Strategy is of strategic significance in that context, providing as it does the framework within which access to international markets via airports will be provided.

The Strategic Transport Forum welcomes the opportunity to submit its initial views in order to help shape the UK's future aviation strategy. The Forum supports the 6 proposed objectives, with this response highlighting why priorities such as: 'building a global and connected Britain'; 'encouraging competitive markets'; 'supporting growth' and 'developing innovation, technology and skills' are so important to the Heartland.

Luton Airport

Luton Airport is of strategic significance in providing access to global markets: it is an integral component of the wider London airport system.

The Airport's ability to accommodate new short/medium haul routes has led to significant growth in passenger numbers, and it is growing fast in terms of linkages with the rest of Europe.

It is one of the top three hubs in Europe for business aviation services, being an access point for international investors. Its strategic importance as a focus for economic activity is further emphasised by the presence of the Luton Airport Enterprise Zone. Construction of the Direct Air to Rail Transit will provide a step change in connectivity between the Airport (including the Enterprise Zone) and Luton Airport Parkway.

Expansion of rail services operating from Luton Airport is therefore of strategic significance and should be viewed as a priority in support of the UK economy.

The National Infrastructure Commission's Interim Report set out the opportunity for the Cambridge- Milton Keynes-Oxford corridor to be the UK's Silicon Valley – a world renowned centre for science, technology and innovation. Luton Airport's role as a key hub for business aviation in Europe is therefore of national significance and must be reflected in future Government strategy and investment.

Passenger data demonstrates the importance of rail access to Luton Airport. It also highlights the extent to which travellers use rail to access stations to the north, as well as the traditional London market, with Luton acting as a gateway to the Midlands. Consequently improved access to/from the airport to opportunities in the Midlands and beyond is extremely important, and will help to achieve Government's ambition to help rebalance the UK economy by supporting economic opportunities identified through the Midlands Engine.

It is essential that surface access by non-car modes is improved in order to limit the impact of the growing airport and also to provide connectivity to the surrounding area (for visitors, staff and economic development).

National investment priorities – in both infrastructure and services – must take this need into account. An immediate priority is to ensure that the next East Midlands rail franchise is used as the opportunity to enhance the level of service provided at Luton Airport Parkway. The Strategic Transport Forum has set out the need for a minimum of 4 trains per hour to call at Luton Airport Parkway providing services to both London, as well as Bedford and key stations to the north. The Forum is pursuing this requirement through an ongoing dialogue with the rail franchise team.

Heathrow Airport

The Strategic Transport Forum supports Government's decision that identified Heathrow Airport as the preferred location for providing additional runway capacity in the London airport system.

As the UK's largest global aviation gateway, it is essential that connectivity to/from the airport is improved in order to enable businesses to benefit from that role. This means that there is a need to ensure that:

- There is no overall increase in the number of private vehicles entering the central area of Heathrow Airport, and that every effort should be made to reduce the absolute number of private vehicles.
- There is appropriate investment into infrastructure and services to provide additional capacity for non-car access to Heathrow Airport.

The Forum has identified a number of strategic transport priorities that it considers as essential in order to meet these requirements, these include (but may not be limited to):

- *Western Rail Link (to Heathrow)*

Delivery of this investment should be prioritised as a matter of urgency in support of 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.

- *Northern Rail Access - upgrade of rail infrastructure linking the Chiltern mainline with the Old Oak Common/Park Royal transport hub*

Building on the delivery of the Elizabeth Line, HS2 and East West Rail, there is an opportunity to realise a step-change in strategic access to Heathrow Airport by linking it, via a single interchange at Old Oak Common, with economic opportunities across the Heartland area and beyond.

Network Rail has already set out the strategic case for opening up access via the Old Oak Common - High Wycombe – Aylesbury - Milton Keynes – Northampton corridor.

A step change in rail access to Heathrow Airport along this corridor is of strategic significance. The addition of 'chiltern' services to the range of interchange opportunities provided at the Old Oak Common hub will significantly increase travel choices for residents and businesses across the Heartland area as well as providing a key link to the airport for a significantly growing population and economy.

Delivery of these infrastructure projects must be viewed as being of a national priority for the Government, who should prioritise their delivery through the national investment programme. The apportionment of costs associated with the delivery of such infrastructure should reflect the fact that additional runway capacity at Heathrow Airport is a national piece of strategic infrastructure.

It is vital that Government identifies, funds, and delivers mitigation measures during the construction phase of providing new runway capacity at Heathrow – such measures to be developed and agreed in partnership with the relevant local transport and planning authorities.

As part of its draft National Policy Statement (Aviation) in May the Government proposed to reform the use of airspace in the London airport system.

The Strategic Transport Forum supports the principle that any change in airspace use should avoid adverse impact on local communities, and where possible look to provide respite for those communities. London Luton Airport is an example of best practice in this area, introducing modern GPS procedures on its westerly departure route since summer 2015 in order to keep aircraft much closer to the centreline of the route resulting in positive effects for local communities on this flight path.

It is noted that the information released to date in support of Heathrow Airport does not include proposals as to how the additional capacity would be reflected in revisions to flight paths. Any change promoted in order to facilitate the additional runway capacity at Heathrow Airport should not adversely affect the operation of other airports operating as part of the London airport system.

The Strategic Transport Forum looks forward to continuing to work closely with Government and the aviation sector in order to ensure that additional runway capacity is delivered to the benefit of the UK's competitiveness in global markets, and that vital surface access improvements for non-car modes are adequately delivered to meet needs and minimise impact.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Heather Smith

Chairman, Strategic Transport Forum
Leader Northamptonshire County Council