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Dear Sir,

## **HEATHROW EXPANSION CONSULTATION RESPONSE: ENGLAND'S ECONOMIC HEARTLAND**

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 Government's emerging Aviation Strategy as this will provides the framework within which to business can ensure access to airports in around the Heartlands is maintained and planned to provide increased access to international markets. The Strategic Transport Forum supports Government's decision 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 plays in the economies of the Heartland. The Forum looks forward to working with Heathrow to ensure that additional investment in the transport network in and through the Heartlands improves productivity by enabling the required step change in access to the airport that will increase 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 Heathrow's initial proposals for the design of an expanded airport and the principles that will guide the future direction of airspace change. Subject to Heathrow fulfilling its transport pledges and environmental commitments, the Forum supports the more effective use of Heathrow's two existing runways. The Forum supports Heathrow's proposals for a night flight ban, a legally binding noise envelope and predicatable respite periods to reduce the impact on communities around the airport. The Forum considers that the pledge to have 'no net increase' in airport related traffic and corresponding investment in surface access capacity to enable passengers and staff to switch to sustainable modes of travel can enable the required improvements in air quality around the airport. The Forum supports this triple lock approach to ensure that new capacity at an expanded Heathrow will only be released when this does not delay compliance with air quality requirements.

- Western Rail Link (to Heathrow)

The Forum endorses Heathrow's financial support for the new Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH). Delivery of this investment should be 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.

A direct link via WRLtH to Reading and to Oxford, Bicester, Milton Keynes and further 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 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.

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

Building on the delivery of the Elizabeth Line, national high speed service provision and East West Rail, the Forum considers that 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. The Forum requests that Heathrow identify the High Wycombe to Old Oak Common link as one of the key building blocks to enable passengers and staff to sustainably access an expanded Heathrow, and for Heathrow and businesses in the Thames Valley to be able to access the pool of talent, educational and research excellence and world leading business clusters in the Heartlands area. This link would along with East West Rail also enable connections to opportunities for planned growth along the Heartlands corridors that are being brought forward the Local Plan process.

Similarly the proposed Metropolitan Line upgrade to link Croxley with Watford Junction in Hertfordshire provides an additional connection options when Old Oak Common hub opens for local communities who may currently choose to access the airport via the M25 due to slow rail journey times, as well as business and leisure passengers and commuters travelling on the West Coast Mainline.

The Forum also stresses the importance of the land procurement in the Old Oak Common project. This needs to happen as soon as possible to maintain flexibility and allow choices for future provisions to be kept open.

- Coach Hub

The Forum supports the expansion of the coach and bus hub at Heathrow. There is an opportunity with increasing passenger numbers and employment in the Heathrow area to introduce new services or increase frequency and patronage from and through Heartlands towns either direct to Heathrow or to connect with direct train services via East West Rail, the Elizabeth Line and mainline stations in and near the Heartlands area.

- Luton Airport

Luton Airport is of strategic significance in providing access to global markets and 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. 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 alongside Heathrow expansion in support of the UK economy. The Strategic Transport Forum has set out the need for a minimum of 4 fast trains per hour to call at Luton Airport Parkway under the future East Midlands franchise providing services to 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.

The expansion of Heathrow to meet the identified need for additional airport capacity in the wider south east and to serve new markets should be seen as complementary to the role which Luton airport plays in the UK economy. In the event that environmental limits curb – temporarily or for an extended period - the expansion of Heathrow passenger numbers and air traffic movements using a third runway in the coming decades, the more effective use of Luton's single runway could provide capacity to serve those destinations and routes.

- Airspace

The Strategic Transport Forum supports the reform of the use of airspace in the London airport system. In modernising airspace the first principles must be that any change in airspace use should avoid adverse impact on local communities, minimise the impacts on previously unaffected communities and where possible look to provide respite for communities on equal basis. London Luton Airport's introduction of GPS procedures on its westerly departure route since summer 2015 demonstrates that the concentration of aircraft closer to the centreline of the route can have positive effects for local communities by reducing the overall footprint of noise impacts on flight paths.

The Forum notes that the information released in the consultation does not include proposals as to how the additional capacity at Heathrow 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 Heathrow 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 Martin Tett**

Chair England's Economic Heartland  
Leader Buckinghamshire County Council