

Sir Peter Hendy
c/o Department for Transport
Great Minster House
London, SW1P 4DR

Sent via email to: ucr@dft.gov.uk

22 April 2021

Dear Sir Peter,

Improved Rail Links to Heathrow

Heathrow Strategic Planning Group (HSPG) is a partnership of local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships surrounding the airport that are proactively planning ahead for the development of the sub-region - regardless of whether their official position is to support or oppose expansion at Heathrow. HSPG membersⁱ want to ensure that the airport is developed in a way that is well planned and sustainable, impacts are mitigated, and benefits are maximised for the communities that live around it.

We write in response to the publication of your interim report on Union Connectivity and to ask that additional focus is placed in the final report of improving rail links to Heathrow airport. We believe these improvements are essential now, irrespective of the future case for or against airport expansion, and offer huge opportunities to support wider government priorities around levelling up and decarbonisation.

London Heathrow is rare among international hub airports in being without rail links to a major part of its economic hinterland. This gap has an adverse economic, social and environmental impact inhibiting much needed prosperity, investment and business growth.

Looking now at the two key connectivity improvements required in turn.

Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH) will bring Heathrow, and the 200 destinations in over 80 countries it serves, closer to South Wales, the Southwest, South central, Thames Valley and the South Midlands, so improving access for 14 million people and many businesses. It will reduce the rail journey time by a minimum of 30 minutes via a single change at Reading, enable direct journeys from Reading and Slough of 25 minutes and 7 minutes respectively and avoid travel via London. It offers the prospect of through trains to the airport from beyond Reading and a faster, far more reliable route than the congested and often blocked motorway network.

WRLtH is a fully developed project able to progress, subject only to final funding and planning approval. It has a well-evidenced Return on Investment to HMG and business.

We commend it as a levelling-up project supporting weaker economies particularly those now hard-hit by Covid.

We believe it will be a catalyst for the recovery of business confidence, inward investment, international trade, regeneration, inbound tourism and aviation. WRLtH will also contribute to meeting the UK's and Heathrow's carbon reduction targets. It will reduce congestion on the M3, M25 and M4, the need for the last of which your report highlights. Other benefits to passengers from Wales and the West will be reduced congestion at London Paddington, and increased capacity and resilience to the rail network more generally.

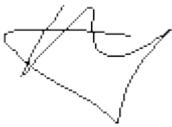
Proposals for improving public transport access to Heathrow from the south, whilst having been discussed for decades and described as a potential 'quick win' in the Airport Commission Report back in 2015, are

still regrettably at an earlier stage of development. It is clear however that there exists a range of opportunities for public transport connectivity that would make a major contribution to the development of a globally competitive region; levelling up (particularly perhaps amongst those communities in the vicinity of the airport historically suffering from highest levels of deprivation and who have been hit particularly hard during the pandemic) and; supporting decarbonisation of the transport network through delivery of modal shift amongst airport users - as well as those taking advantage of interchange opportunities such a 'hub on the ground' would offer.

We are aware that the business, economic and environmental case for WRLtH, and for the economic case work completed to date for a southern link, have all been based on a two-runway airport scenario – and they all demonstrate excellent value for money. These links should not therefore be dependent on Heathrow expansion and can be constructed without compromising future expansion.

Whilst it is right and proper that there is a moment of reflection given the disruption of the past 12 months, there is every indication that Heathrow will return to full capacity well before these links can realistically be in-service (c2030) and so, in our opinion, every attempt should be made to be pushing these vital schemes through the relevant planning processes and towards being genuinely 'shovel ready' as quickly as practicable.

Yours sincerely



Mark Frost
Associate Director

On Behalf of HSPG members.

ⁱ Current members of HSPG are:

Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership, London Borough of Ealing, Elmbridge Borough Council, London Borough of Hounslow, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Runnymede Borough Council, Slough Borough Council, Spelthorne Borough Council, Surrey County Council, Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Other organisations participate in many of the activities of the HSPG with 'Observer' status, including: Buckinghamshire Council, Colne Valley Regional Park, London Borough of Hillingdon, London Borough of Richmond, Department for Transport (Aviation Team and others), Transport for London, Environment Agency, Highways England, Natural England, Public Health England, and the West London Alliance (of West London Boroughs). West London Business.