

National Infrastructure Commission call for evidence: London's transport infrastructure

Written evidence submitted by Chairman of Western Rail Access to Heathrow Stakeholder Steering Group

Introduction

The Western Rail link to Heathrow is a scheme confirmed in the Hendy Review as a priority for delivery yet with completion delayed to c 2024. This scheme has been in development and promoted by Thames Valley Berkshire LEP and its predecessors to answer the needs of business and leisure passengers to reach Heathrow by rail from the west. The scheme is supported by business and local authorities across the south west, south Wales and Thames Valley representing the business and residential communities whose access to Heathrow will be approved when the scheme is delivered.

The scheme also offers the opportunity to create a through route from the west to Paddington so enhancing capacity, resilience and passenger options and generating benefits to London and its hinterland beyond those originally planned and forecast.

A western rail link to Heathrow is deliverable, affordable and sensible solution to an acknowledged gap in the UK's strategic transport infrastructure. The link can be delivered in a relatively short period of time, requires minimal disruption to the existing transport network, existing properties and has minimal visual impact.

Although the scheme has been confirmed in the Hendy review it has met regular delays and requires drive from government through the DfT, BIS and Treasury. The business case is strong and ROI swift. The benefits to UK plc justify its urgent delivery.

Heathrow is one of the few international hub airports which does not have access to the economic hinterland of its city location. The economic importance of such a link is demonstrated by:

- 70% of foreign owned businesses establishing in the UK locate within 60 minutes of Heathrow;
- 75% of businesses in the Thames Valley state proximity to Heathrow as the primary factor for their choice of location;
- 202 of the UK's top 300 companies are located within 25 miles of Heathrow.

The opportunity of improving the connectivity and speed of access to Heathrow and to London of 12 million people across the South West, South Wales, West Midlands, South Coast and Thames Valley is being missed.

1. What are the major economic and social challenges facing London and its commuter hinterland over the next two to three decades?

We question the reference to commuter hinterland. We would ask that the commission recognises the interdependencies in the commuter patterns and business structures and recognises the strength of and access to a wide economic hinterland as offering additional benefits to greater London.

- Transport – The west is relatively well served by rail transport links in to and out of London but lacks the rail transport infrastructure to make orbital journeys around London. The Western Rail Link to Heathrow scheme due to be delivered by the end of Network Rail's Control Period 6 programme is a vital link for the wider Thames Valley and further afield in providing a direct transport link to Heathrow.
- Economy – Access to and from business, labour and employment in the hinterland will add to the London's critical mass as a global centre, provide supply chain opportunities and other synergies.

2. What are the strategic options for future investment in large-scale transport infrastructure improvements in London - on road, rail and underground - including, but not limited to Crossrail 2?

How should they be prioritised, taking account of their response to London's strategic transport challenges, including their impact on capacity, reliability, journey times and connectivity to jobs?

What might their potential impact be on employment, productivity and housing supply in London and the southeast?

The **Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH)** scheme offers economic and environmental benefits to London by strengthening its economic hinterland as well as offering very significant benefits to the hinterland. It will improve access to Heathrow for 12 million people to the west of London, particularly the Thames Valley and including the far south west and south Wales. It has the potential to deliver a through route to Paddington via Heathrow.

- The business, economic and environmental case for the scheme, first assessed in 2011 and now being refreshed and based on the current two runway airport, is strong – £1.5 billion of efficiency savings, £800 million of additional economic activity, 42,000 new jobs, modal shift from road to rail, one million fewer road journeys and 5,200 tonnes less CO2 released into the atmosphere – and are projected to be stronger.
- The scheme is particularly important in retaining and attracting major business to the Thames Valley and beyond. 75% of businesses state access to Heathrow as a primary factor in their choice of location
- The maintenance and enhancement of the strength of the economic hinterland will have additional benefits to London. The potential modal shift of traffic to Heathrow from road to rail (currently estimated at c20% from Reading and Slough) will have a positive impact on traffic flows on the strategic road network to the immediate west of London.
- The scheme is now anticipated to enable an additional through route from the west to Paddington, so creating added capacity, resilience and passenger options on the rail network and potential greater modal shift. This will have additional economic and environmental benefits to London and the hinterland.
- The scheme has been confirmed in the Hendy Review but to a later timetable. This largely reflects the past and recent delays in delivery. It will now not be operational until 2024 delaying the realisation of these significant benefits and potentially deterring business commitment further. . It was originally anticipated that the scheme could be open for use before 2020.

Action: We would like to see the National Infrastructure Commission reviewing the scheme delivery plan and working with delivery agencies to identify and implement actions that bring forward the operational date. Schemes which have a strong business case, strong local and regional support, and a clear identified need should be prioritised.

Action: We would like to see the National Infrastructure Commission reviewing the Development Consent Order (DCO) process in general to look at the burdens and delays inherent within the process to identify ways in which it can be streamlined.

3. What opportunities are there to increase the benefits and reduce the costs of the proposed Crossrail 2 scheme?

No comment.

4. What are the options for the funding, financing and delivery of large-scale transport infrastructure improvements in London, including Crossrail 2?

What is an appropriate local and regional contribution - given the potential distribution of benefits to business, residents, transport users and the wider economy - and how could this be achieved?

What innovative funding mechanisms could be considered to support delivery of key schemes?

No comment.

5. How have major metropolitan areas in other countries responded to similar challenges and priorities? Are there any lessons to be learned and applied in London?

No comment.

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