

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

Written evidence submitted by Slough Borough Council

Introduction

Slough is integrated into the heart of the UK transport and communications network, being located between the M4, M40 and the M25. It benefits from three exits off the M4 motorway giving easy access to both London and the West Country, three railway stations (Slough, Burnham and Langley) providing links to Reading and London Paddington via the Great Western mainline and is located within 10 minutes of London's Heathrow Airport.

The borough is home to the Slough Trading Estate, the largest privately owned industrial estate in Europe, and has the highest concentration of corporate headquarters in the country (outside London). Slough is attractive as a business location because of its transport connections but it lacks a direct rail connection to Heathrow, something that local businesses say is required – Heathrow currently has rail access in only one direction, towards London.

Slough has broadly equal numbers of outward and inward commuters travelling to and from London on a daily basis – 13,178 residents travel to London and 11,012 workers travel from London [source: Census, 2011].

Many Slough residents rely on Heathrow for their livelihoods, with more than 7,000 working in airline related industries, and with 5.6% of Heathrow's directly employed staff drawn from Slough.

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 and would ask that the commission recognises the interdependencies in the commuter patterns and in business structures and reflect that Slough functions as a part of a greater London.

- Economy – Slough has a strong and thriving economy but the town's proximity to London and its strong links with the UK's transport and communications network are recognised as providing a key locational advantage for business. Access to this concentration of business and employment land on the edge of London adds to the city's critical mass as a global centre, supply chain opportunities and other synergies. Securing a pipeline of affordable employment land and premises is a challenge.

- Labour supply – Analysis by the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (TVB LEP) has identified labour supply issues as the single biggest threat to the continued growth of the Berkshire economy.
- Skills – The demand for higher level and specialist technician level skills by business continues to grow and the skills system is not always delivering what business needs leading to skills shortages and hard to fill vacancies. The increase in travel to work times suggests that businesses have to recruit from a wider catchment area to fill their vacancies.
- Housing – Demand for housing is increasing rapidly and the recent Strategic Housing Market Area Assessment (SHMAA) for Slough has indicated that we need to build in excess of 900 dwellings each year, a significant increase on the previous SHMAA of less than 350 dwellings each year. The delivery of schemes such as Crossrail, are driving up the demand and cost for housing locally. The shortage of development land for housing represents a significant challenge in delivering the housing numbers required to satisfy the housing need from within the borough and therefore any outward movement from London.
- Transport – Slough is 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 Slough, the wider Thames Valley and further afield in providing a direct transport link to Heathrow.

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?

Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH) – This scheme offers economic and environmental benefits to London by strengthening its economic hinterland as well as 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 projected to be stronger.
- The scheme is particularly important in retaining major business in 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 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.

Great Western Mainline services – A fast (under 20 minutes) train service to London is available twice per hour only with the remainder of trains operating as stopping services taking in the order of 45 minutes to reach London. Although not a large scale infrastructure improvement, incremental upgrade of services to run more frequent fast train services would make a significant difference to train service users in and out of London. Similarly, by introducing Oyster card payment (scheduled for introduction when Crossrail services go live) or contactless payment card systems now would provide rail service users with simpler, faster access to trains.

Cycle schemes – Slough has invested in a [cycle hire](#) scheme which it would like to see integrated with the London “Boris Bikes” scheme, extending the reach of the Slough scheme and providing a seamless hire facility for cycle users. To facilitate safe cycling we would like to see investment in safe, green cycle pathways connecting Slough to London, for example, by upgrading the towpath of the Grand Union canal.

Slough Mass Rapid Transit (SMaRT) – Slough has started work on a scheme that will provide a priority bus service for workers arriving at Slough Station to travel to their workplace on the Slough Trading Estate; the second phase of this scheme will see the service extended to Heathrow. We would like to see the service extended further but this will not be possible without the support of Transport for London and the London Borough of Hillingdon.

Action: We would like to see the National Infrastructure Commission recommending and facilitating closer working between public transport authorities to create more flexible bus service routes and supporting road network upgrades to facilitate priority bus services, for example, A4 corridor from Slough to Hillingdon.

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.

Slough Borough Council gives consent for this submission to be published and identified as the author.

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