

Rt Hon Sir Alan Haselhurst MP
Chair of the West Anglia Taskforce

National Infrastructure Commission
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

By email to: london@infrastructure-commission.gsi.gov.uk

8 January 2016

RE: NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE COMMISSION CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Dear Andrew,

I write on behalf of the West Anglia Taskforce in response to the National Infrastructure Commission's invitation for evidence. The Taskforce is currently in the middle of an exercise compiling the evidence base for investing in the West Anglia Main Line (WAML) and will report its initial findings to the Government in the summer of this year. Members of the Taskforce include MPs, Council leaders and cabinet members, senior officers from the Department for Transport, Network Rail, and Transport for London and representatives of key businesses and business groups from along the route.

Investment in the WAML is necessary because the London Stansted Cambridge Corridor it serves has a unique value to the UK economy, and is growing fast:

- The corridor is one of the most successful economic regions in the UK, linking the university city of Cambridge with London, passing through identified growth areas such as the Upper Lee Valley (London's largest Opportunity Area) and the Harlow Enterprise Zone. The Centre for Economics and Business Research has projected that Cambridge will be the fastest growing city in the UK in 2016, growing at 2.9 per cent; London is expected to grow at 2.7 per cent.
- The corridor is a crucial arm of the London, Cambridge and Oxford 'golden triangle' which is driving technology and bioscience-led economic growth in the UK, and is home to major international operations from Microsoft Research, ARM Holdings, AstraZeneca, GSK, Pfizer and Illumina. Life Sciences and medical technology is the third largest contributor to economic growth in the UK and, according to research by the London Stansted Cambridge Consortium in 2015, is set to generate over 14,000 new jobs by 2023.
- The rail line is the primary gateway for domestic and international passengers using Stansted Airport, one of Europe's fastest-growing major airports, with onward connections to over 160 destinations in Europe, North Africa and North America. As pressure on airport capacity continues to grow in the south east, Stansted occupies a

unique position in the region as the only airport with spare runway capacity and room to grow in the future.

- London and Cambridge are ranked first and fourth respectively in the 2014/15 FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) Intelligence "Top European Cities of the Future", based on their favourability for inward investment. Cambridge already has over 320 foreign-owned enterprises, supporting nearly 20,000 jobs and contributing almost £5bn in turnover. Not investing here could mean that business goes abroad and the UK loses out.

However, transport and housing constraints in the corridor are already beginning to limit this growth:

- The number of jobs in the area has increased at more than double the national rate in the last ten years. This creates a clear concern about how increasing numbers of commuters to the growing businesses along the corridor will access their places of work.
- A shortage of skilled labour will hold back companies from investing in the corridor, and there is already evidence that the labour market is tight. There are now historically low unemployment rates in some areas; for example, the unemployment in the district of Littleford is only 0.7 per cent (and this will continue as Stansted Airport and other businesses locally expand). An employer survey by the South East LEP found that there are many vacancies across the area in technical roles requiring higher-level education and that 23.7% of vacancies were due to skills shortages. This is despite the fact that in many areas of the corridor, the percentage of the workforce holding degrees is significantly higher than the national average.

- The building of new homes in the area is not keeping pace with population growth forecasts. In the last five years, only 9,400 new homes have been delivered in the corridor per year, with ONS forecasts suggesting that 16,800 each year are needed.
- The WAML currently consists of just two tracks along its entire length. With fast and slow services competing for space, this results in longer journey times, a limit to the number of services that can run and a high risk of service disruption due to a lack of alternative routes if one track is out of action. This creates an uneasy contrast between the area's first class businesses and the second class railway on which their workers and visitors need to travel to access them. Journey times on the Stansted Express, for example, have increased in recent years with some trips now taking over 50 minutes; this is entirely wrong in terms of supporting a growing airport and wider airport capacity requirements in the South East.

Improving the railway line by providing extra tracks on the busiest parts offers an excellent opportunity to unlock thousands of new homes and jobs along the route, as well as enhancing international transport links:

- There are several ways of improving journey times, increasing resilience and providing new capacity on the railway, but the most effective way of achieving all three is by laying additional track. Providing two extra tracks on the busiest part of the line means that fast and slow services can be separated, allowing for quicker journeys, the ability to operate more trains and a reduced risk of delays.

- Four-tracking the railway from Broxbourne to Tottenham Hale, for example, would enable shorter journey times between Cambridge, Stansted and London, more frequent services where they are needed and improvements to the resilience and reliability of the route as a whole.
- As well as unlocking housing and employment potential by improving links between the hubs of London and Cambridge, this proposal would provide huge benefits to users and employees of Stansted Airport. Fast services to the airport are currently hampered by sharing track space with slower local services, and four-tracking would alleviate this pressure. The Airports Commission specifically recognised the need to make use of the potential available at Stansted Airport for the benefit of the whole of the south east, and four-tracking would represent a big step towards realising this aim.

Crossrail 2 is required to maximise the potential opportunities and underpin a successful corridor for decades to come

- Four-tracking alone will unlock significant growth potential along the WAML corridor, but these benefits would be hugely enhanced by Crossrail 2. While the existing WAML terminates at two London stations with limited opportunities for expansion – Stratford and Liverpool Street – Crossrail 2 would provide an outlet for many more trains to serve the line, enabling a step-change in service frequency. Crossrail 2 could allow up to 15 trains per hour to serve WAML stations on a new four-tracked section through the Lee Valley.
- Four-tracking followed by Crossrail could unlock up to 70,000 new homes and 25,000 new jobs in the WAML corridor alone. Tens of thousands of new homes could provide businesses from Cambridge to London with a substantial expansion of their labour market.
- The early delivery of four-tracking by 2024 will ensure that this growth can be kick-started ahead of Crossrail 2 opening in 2030.

Making the case for four-tracking and Crossrail 2

The West Anglia Taskforce has been set the challenge of making a compelling case for investment in this corridor and is working hard to gather the evidence needed to ensure a robust business case is submitted to the Government in summer 2016.

Ahead of this, the Taskforce looks forward to supporting the work of the National Infrastructure Commission over the next few months as it analyses and examines potential schemes and provides its own evidence to Government.

Yours sincerely

Rt Hon Sir Alan Haselhurst MP

Chair of the West Anglia Taskforce