



Rt Hon David TC Davies
Secretary of State for Wales
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Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group
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26th May 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

Western Rail Link to Heathrow – a stimulus to growth, investment, and research in Wales

Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC) is one of the UK's largest accredited Chambers, with around 4000 members and active trade customers. We are active in supporting our members and wider business community deliver economic growth and job creation; our work priorities are outlined in our annual [Business Manifesto](#).

The Thames Valley is the fastest-growing region in the UK, outside London, and one of the most productive. We acknowledge the opportunities that our access to London and the world has given us and we are committed to working with others to support the wider economy of UK.

You will be well aware that access to the UK's only hub-airport, London Heathrow, drives that economy. For this reason, our members and our colleagues in the South Wales Chamber of Commerce and other Chambers across the benefitting area have consistently supported our efforts to secure the timely delivery of the [Western Rail Link to Heathrow](#) (WRLtH).

On behalf of our membership and numerous stakeholders representing the potential 14 million beneficiaries who have long supported the WRLtH, we are writing to gain your support for a discussion about how TVCC, and our partners, can offer a funding and finance solution well in advance of any traditional delivery route and so secure the considerable economic, social, and environmental outcomes WRLtH offers to South Wales and multiple English regions.

WRLtH is:

- A fully developed and costed project capable of rapid delivery subject only to planning and final funding approval.
- Transformational – bringing substantive improvement in connectivity to 14 million people – delivering a minimum 30-minute journey time saving from main stations in South Wales
- A growth project – stimulating business investment, retention, regeneration, and inbound tourism, and enabling international research partnerships throughout the catchment of multiple regions.
- A levelling-up project – serving and supporting regional economies in South Wales, the Southwest, South Central and Midlands including those regions hardest hit by Covid-19 and addressing the Government's objective of Union Connectivity
- A carbon reduction project – delivering ambitious UK climate change targets, mitigating the impact of Heathrow, and delivering modal shift from road to rail.

- Not dependent on Heathrow expansion – the business case and projected benefits were developed on a two-runway airport.
- Able to deliver additional resilience and capacity to the rail network.

As you may know, in January 2020, with a business case approved by Department for Transport (DfT) and the Treasury, the WRLtH project was due to progress to a Development Consent Order (DCO) application, subject only to an agreed funding statement. Agreement was imminent when, sadly, COVID intervened. The project was brought to a controlled pause in 2021 with no prospect or certainty of being relaunched until Heathrow Airport Limited's (HAL) CP8 at the earliest.

Your department may also be aware, there remains an extensive regional and national support for WRLtH from other Chambers of Commerce, local authorities including major authorities in South Wales, MPs (including the WRLtH APPG and several Welsh MPs), the Senedd, Welsh businesses, Universities, Regional Transportation and Tourism bodies.

We are acutely aware of the dilemma the Government faces of deploying limited resources for much needed infrastructure. In the last year TVCC and its partners have sought to develop a financial model which will eliminate or reduce the need for public funding. We now believe there may be a solution and our next step is to test that. We have recently secured agreement from the DfT, HAL, and Network Rail to the release of data underlying the earlier business case. It is our intention to review that and to remodel the case today and so bring forward a proposal.

With the information described above, and below my signature, we aim to be in position to submit an outline funding proposal later this year. At that time, we trust you will be happy for us to write to you again to present our proposals.

In the meantime, we would be pleased to have a preliminary discussion with you, or one of your Departmental Ministers, if a meeting can be scheduled at your convenience.

Gyda'n diolch

Yr eiddoch yn gywir

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Britton', with a horizontal line underneath.

Paul Britton
Chief Executive

cc'd to: Rt Hon David TC Davies c/o Secretary of State for Wales, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, William Morgan House, 6-7 Central Square, Cardiff, South Glamorgan, Wales, CF10 1EP

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About the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and the WRLtH project

Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC) is one of the largest accredited Chambers within the UK and the only accredited Chamber of Commerce for the Thames Valley region. The Chamber is a proven centre of excellence for trade and the only UK Chamber directly delivering investment services to Government.

Representing over 4,000 companies in membership, with an economy estimated in size to be more than £83,848m, it is home to over 115,000 businesses, including: 11 of the world's top 15 tech companies; the No.1 University in the world (Oxford); fastest growing city (Reading) in the UK; two of the highest performing cities (Oxford and Reading); the second largest trading city in the UK (Slough) and the most productive city per capita (Slough). The Thames Valley is, consistently, one of the highest performing in regions, outside of London, for attracting foreign direct investment.

We are the true turbo economy helping to drive the UK's ambitions to be a science and technology superpower.

TVCC credits a range of impressive statistics:

- 295,000 combined number of staff employed by our members.
- 5000+ number of active trade customers.
- In 2022 the value of trade exports we facilitated as a Chamber was estimated at £5,918,976,185.
- Average 150 new trade customers each year.
- 178 countries trading with our customers.
- Eighty-three sectors represented by members and international trade customers.
- 65% of international companies setting up or expanding in the region have been supported by TVCC.
- We are the only UK Chamber directly delivering inward investment services to Government.

