

Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group

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9<sup>th</sup> June 2023

Submitted via email to: [engagement@englandseconomicheartland.com](mailto:engagement@englandseconomicheartland.com)

To whom it may concern,

### **England's Economic Heartland, 'call for evidence' survey**

On behalf of the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC), we thank you for the opportunity to provide the following comments on the Transport Strategy for England's Economic Heartland (EEH). We would like to refer you to our previous responses, with our response to the Outline Transport Strategy in 2019, [HERE](#) and the wider consultation response in 2020 [HERE](#).

The TVCC is the only accredited Chamber of Commerce for Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Swindon – much of the EEH area. This includes the two areas of focus from Buckinghamshire to Milton Keynes-Northampton and the Southern East West Movements from Buckinghamshire to Hertfordshire. We would like to draw your attention to our [Local Policy Priority Statements](#) and for the call of evidence, our priorities for [Buckinghamshire](#) and Oxfordshire, will support our comments here and outline our members wider priorities.

TVCC is committed to supporting the futureproofing and securing investment in resilient infrastructure and utility networks (including water, digital, telecommunications, air, road, and rail) for the region. As one of four main priorities, this is clearly demonstrated in the Chamber's key policy statement document, the 2023 [Business Manifesto and included in the actions we are focused:](#)

- To continue to encourage policy and proposals that will deliver sustainable, integrated, multi-modal travel systems.
- To help secure the timely delivery of the [Western Rail Link to Heathrow](#) (WRLtH) project.
- To reinforce our commitment to [London Heathrow](#) (to help with its post pandemic recovery and delivery of key growth and [sustainability](#) targets).
- Sustain our efforts to help secure the investments that will deliver greater resilience in our infrastructure networks.

#### Consultation with TVCC Members:

Having consulted with selected members of the TVCC the over-arching themes that the connectivity study should look to consider, when developing a package of potential measures are decarbonisation, digital connectivity, and accessibility/levelling up.

We have also completed the survey and provided detailed information on key journeys in the region. We commend your attention for business-led and developed priorities in developing your Transport Strategy, including the WRLtH - a

project that will significantly benefit businesses (particularly those within freight and logistics), residents and the economy in the Thames Valley (including the EEH region).

In addition, we would encourage the following priorities as a means to secure investment in and deliver resilience regional infrastructure networks:

- Continued investment in 5G and fibre throughout the region.
- Reduce congestion on major routes and commuter areas, e.g., by modal shift to sustainable forms of transport.
- Provide or enhance rail services including freight across country, e.g., Bicester to Northampton, Banbury to Northampton, Oxford to Northampton, Banbury, and Bicester to Aylesbury as an alternative and in addition to road and safety improvements on major roads, including the A34, A43.
- Co-ordinate rail services via Oxford and Reading to all points beyond
- Improvements to rail parking wherever needed - in number, EV charging points, provision for cyclists.
- Provide cycle and walking routes round all commuter centres.
- Congestion reduction and safety improvements on A404.
- Reduce congestion around Northampton, e.g., by sustainable forms of transport.
- Improve the Aylesbury "ring road".

### Making the Heartland Work for the UK

In addition to the comments outlined in our previous responses, TVCC is actively engaged and contributes to trade and inward investment activities that support the region. For instance, we refer you to TVCC's [inward investment portal](#) that from a sector/market perspective helps drive FDI into the region and promotes the region to our international audience encouraging international entities to invest in the region. TVCC has proven expertise in helping co-ordinate and deliver inward investment activity across the region, adding to its position as a leading international business location and consistently one of the highest performing regions for inward investment outside of London.

### Potential Transport Gaps

There are several gaps that have been brought to our attention which we would like to raise:

- M40 Junction 9 to 10 and associated A34 inside and outside study area, J5 to M25 is very congested.
- A43 single carriageway.
- Bicester to Milton Keynes rail service and the rail service from Milton Keynes to High Wycombe.
- A404 congested particularly at various junctions.
- Digital cover particularly in rural areas.
- Freight capacity and access points.
- Adequate cycle routes and associated provision.

In submitting the above comments, and completing the online survey, we also draw your attention to previous [consultation responses](#). We invite you to review and note the representations and comments made in these as being relevant to your wider programme of work, and business views. These include but are not limited to:

- Oxfordshire County Council: [Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan](#) Consultation – 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022
- Transport for the SouthEast (TfSE): [A Strategic Investment Plan for the South East](#) - 9<sup>th</sup> September 2022
- [Oxford's Economic Strategy Consultation](#) - 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022
- [Oxfordshire Plan 2050](#) Consultation Response – 7<sup>th</sup> October 2021
- [Hendy Review](#): Union Connectivity Call for Evidence – 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2020
- [England's Economic Heartland Draft Transport Strategy](#) – 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020
- [Decarbonising Transport Setting the Challenge](#) – Creating a Plan for Decarbonising Transport – 28<sup>th</sup> August 2020

We thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on this Strategy and we welcome every opportunity to not only be consulted, **but to be directly invited to be involved as a key stakeholder in future work**, helping to further shape and frame the region's infrastructure priorities.



**Paul Britton**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group**

### **About the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce**

The 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 inward investment services.

Representing over 4,000 companies in membership, with an economy estimated in size to be more than £83,848m (2015), 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 (EY); once again, the two highest performing cities (Oxford and Reading) according to PwC; the second largest trading city in the UK (Slough); the most productive city per capita (Slough) (Centre for Cities) and the No.1 region, outside of London, for attracting inward investment. In addition, the Thames Valley Chamber credits a range of impressive statistics:

- 295,000 combined number of staff employed by members
- 5000+ number of active trade customers
- £3,847,682,487 – the value of Chamber facilitated exports during 2022
- Average 150 new trade customers each year
- 183 countries trading with our customers
- 83 sectors represented by members and international trade customers
- Consistently one of the UK's most attractive locations for attracting inward investment
- 65% of international companies setting up or expanding in the Thames Valley have been supported by TVCC.