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The Rt. Hon Rachel Reeves MP
Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer
House of Commons
London, SW1A 0AA

7th March 2024

Delivered via email: rachel.reeves.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Rachel Reeves,

Western Rail Link to Heathrow – a stimulus to growth, inward investment, connectivity, and carbon reduction

I write to you about the Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH) scheme, which would connect 20% of the UK population to within one interchange of our nation's main, and only, hub airport.

Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC) is one of the UK's largest accredited Chambers, with around 4000 members and active trade customers.

TVCC is active in supporting our members, and wider business community, deliver investment, economic growth, and job creation. Our business-led work priorities are outlined in our annual [Business Manifesto](#), including a long-standing commitment to supporting the timely delivery of the [WRLtH scheme](#). TVCC are working with several stakeholders, including Heathrow Airport Ltd, Network Rail, Great Western Railway, Atkins, and other business representatives to secure a funding and finance solution. With renewed political support and following an invitation from the Department for Transport (DfT), who are sharing extensive data, TVCC is leading on a refresh of the business and economic case for the scheme.

The WRLtH scheme: will be a stimulus to growth and our ambitions to be a science and technology superpower; is a driver of inward investment; is a carbon reduction project helping support our transition to net-zero and supports levelling-up. Importantly, greater connectivity to Heathrow, affords benefits to jobs, growth, trade, tourism, education, and regeneration beyond the immediate Thames Valley, to areas including Wales, the Southwest, Midlands and wider Southeast. This is why our work is supported by Chambers from all these regions as well as MPs and peers who are both members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on WRLtH and have offered public statements of support, including, for example MP's [Luke Pollard](#), [Gerald Jones](#) and; Dame Nia Griffith.

Last month we had the pleasure, once again, of welcoming Tanmanjeet Dhesi to a meeting of TVCC's WRLtH working group, in his capacity as chair of the APPG for WRLtH, alongside the APPG's Secretary, James Sunderland. Tan and James encouraged us to write to you to seek clarification on the following points:

1. Does the Labour Party support the timely delivery of the WRLtH scheme?
2. Will the Labour Party make this commitment to include its support for the scheme in its forthcoming Party Manifesto?

3. Would a future Labour government commit to providing public money to fund all / part of the WRLtH scheme (see also questions 4 and 5)?

On the financing of WRLtH, we were prompted by Tan who highlighted his exchange with Huw Merriman, The Minister of State on [26th October 2023](#), which stated, *“this project was due to be funded 50:50, but things have changed post pandemic for Heathrow, so it is right that it goes back to the drawing board. We will always support rail investments that can be paid for by private enterprise”*.

Reflecting on your answer to question 3, may we invite your response to the views of a future Labour government on:

4. Looking at some form of public:private sector funding of the WRLtH scheme, what approx. split would you consider?
5. In regard any future, private sector contribution, what is your view of Chinese and/or Middle Eastern based financing?
6. On question 5, what guarantees, and when, might you provide to help advance early conversations?

Our thanks in advance for your consideration of the above and we welcome the opportunity of speaking with you, or Darren, further on our work on the WRLtH and any of our questions above.

Yours sincerely



Paul Britton
Chief Executive
Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group

cc: Darren Jones MP, Tan Dhesi MP, James Sunderland, MP

Background

You will be aware that access to the UK's only hub-airport, London Heathrow, drives the economy. For this reason, our members, and our colleagues in Chambers of Commerce across the benefitting area have consistently supported our efforts to secure the timely delivery of the WRLtH which 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.
- A growth project – stimulating business investment, retention, and regeneration throughout the catchment of multiple regions, and sustaining the volume and value of FDI including bringing Swindon and Oxford within the golden hour for inward investment.
- 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.