

Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group

150 Edinburgh Avenue Slough

Berkshire SL1 4SS

Tel: +44 (0)1753 870500

Executive Assistant: Alexandra Keane: +44 (0)1753 870582

Email: AlexandraKeane@tvchamber.co.uk

www.thamesvalleychamber.co.uk

Via Email to: tfse@eastsussex.gov.uk

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To whom it may concern,

**Transport for the South-East
Draft Transport Strategy Consultation**

Our apologies, but we would prefer to submit a letter response, rather than survey response, to the Draft Transport Strategy (hereafter 'the Strategy'). The following are the substantive comments we wish to make on behalf of the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce membership. The 'pages' below relate, primarily, to the summary Strategy document, unless stated.

Challenges (page -6-)

The Strategy outlines that research has identified eight key challenges (including productivity, climate resilience and connectivity) that need to be tackled if the region is to succeed. We invite you to consider:

- International Trade: [London Heathrow airport is the largest port](#), by value in the United Kingdom, with 70% of all UK air cargo - by value – travelling through Heathrow, connecting all the UK's regions with export opportunities and tourism. Sustaining Heathrow's position as the UK's only hub airport and largest port should be included.
- We do think there are other challenges the Strategy should consider, namely: "Surface Access to Heathrow." The importance and impact of the Western Rail Link to London Heathrow ([WRLtH](#)) scheme, and southern rail access, are significant potential drivers of unlocking the economic potential of the southeast. When delivered WRLtH will also make a significant impact on helping deliver climate resilience, reduce congestion, achieve equitable prosperity, and address decarbonisation 'challenges. For these reasons, and our wider comments made in this submission, the timely delivery of these scheme must be identified as a key challenge within the Strategy.

Vision and Goals (page -7-)

We support the broad vision and goals in the Strategy.

Key Priorities map (page -11-) and other 'summary' maps.

We believe there is fundamental 'gap' in the priorities map/s not to include the WRLtH scheme. Indeed, for it not to get a single reference, in your summary Strategy document, is staggering.

In the full Strategy it gets, we believe, very few references (e.g., pages -14-, -48- and -99-). How a £1.5bn project that is *a game-changer for businesses and communities* across the southeast is positioned in the Strategy, verses, for example, the £63m Hoo Peninsula Passenger Rail Access project is – at best – rather interesting. We strongly encourage you to re-consider this in the Strategy, also reflecting on the following:

Western Rail Link to London Heathrow (WRLtH)

In considering the wider Strategy, we raise the points concerning this scheme and invite your review to reshape and update the Strategy with greater consideration of the scheme and include:

- For the reasons we outline in this submission, and on our website [HERE](#) (see also adjournment debate link), the Strategy must have a lot stronger reference/s to this scheme throughout. We also refer you back to wider consultations responses, e.g., [Comprehensive Spending Review](#) (02/2025); [Open Letter to Rachel Reeves](#) (12/2024); [Open Letter to Secretary of State for Transport](#) (07/2024); [Great British Railways](#) (04/2022); [Union Connectivity](#) (12/2020).
- WRLtH should be recognised as a solution to existing pressures arising from Heathrow and an opportunity to release growth early. The business case approved by DfT and Treasury in 2019 assumed and mitigated the usage of the present airport.
- We need the Strategy, and government, to support new and improved rail links to our airports, including Heathrow, to reduce road congestion, improve air quality, and lower carbon emissions.
- WRLtH would connect the airport to the Great Western Railway (GWR) mainline, offering swift access avoiding a London interchange for passengers from the south coast including Hampshire and Sussex, Southwest, the West Midlands and South Wales. Once complete, the scheme would connect 20% of the UK population to within one interchange of the UK's only hub airport and provide up to 14m people with substantive improvements in their connectivity to the airport.
- WRLtH would cut congestion on major roads including M3, M4 and M25 and reduce carbon emissions by an estimated 30m road miles annually. The scheme would achieve these benefits while meeting the future demands of passengers as Heathrow upgrades and expands, cementing the airport's position as the UK's gateway to growth.
- WRLtH will help deliver against many of the ambitions outlined in the Strategy's Integrated Sustainability Appraisal.
- WRLtH will boost the UK economy by hundreds of millions of pounds, especially in the Thames Valley, Southeast, Southwest, and Wales, creating jobs during construction and after completion.
- WRLtH will boost the UK and region's global credibility as serious about growth by offering direct or improved rail access to about half the airport's hinterland. Heathrow is unusual among Europe's international hub airports in not having such access.
- Under strategic connectivity (page -21-) the Strategy references that a key action is to "develop business cases for schemes". TVCC has, and continues to, engage TfSE to contribute (financially) to the economic refresh study for WRLtH and support (communications/publicity) wider marketing / lobbying. The fact that TfSE has, to date, not joined the private and public sector funders is disappointing given WRLtH is such an important, and impactful, scheme for the southeast and UK plc. There is further scope for TfSE to support, and finance, a 'phase 2' of the economic study, ref: develop a private finance model (using WRLtH as an example). We invite TfSE to engage to maximise funding and avoid unnecessary duplication.

Heathrow

- In the Strategy (page -10-) rail connections to Heathrow are listed as long-term priority 'only'. Heathrow's contribution to the vision and goals should be a short- and long- term priority of the

Strategy. The commissioning of the economic refresh study for the WRLtH scheme (see above) is, very much, a short-term priority currently being funded by the private sector. Progressing the development consent order (DCO) for the scheme a short- to medium-term that could be delivered in advance of and not reliant on any expansion plans.

- In the full Strategy document (page -14-) a long-term priority is listed as “developing new rail connections to international gateways, including links to Heathrow and Gatwick”. For the reasons we outlined above, we would look to make the case that the Strategy should list it as a ‘short-term priority’ given the government’s recent backing of Heathrow’s plans to upgrade terminal capacity and build a third runway.

Global Policy Interventions (page -84- full Strategy)

We support the broad interventions listed here.

With reference to the region-wide Planning Priorities we recommend you to the work that the British Chambers of Commerce have been leading on behalf of the Accredited Chamber network on the [‘Planning Skills Fund’](#) encouraging TfSE, where appropriate, to ‘join-forces’ to unblock the planning system through more skills and capacity.

Finally, we welcome further, explicit, details on the:

- ‘Thames Valley Mass Transit’ scheme referenced (which appears a bus improvement scheme) and ensuring stronger connections from Reading to Wokingham, via/through Thames Valley Science Park (home of Shinfield Studios)
- Absence of any reference, we believe, to a ‘third bridge crossing’ of the River Thames.
- Value to reconsider a MRT connecting Reading railway station with Thames Valley Park.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Strategy, and value our partnership with TfSE (TVCC are members of the Business Advisory Group and welcome TfSE’s closer involvement in our WRLtH working group).

Yours sincerely,



Paul Britton
Chief Executive Officer

[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 region. The Chamber is a proven centre of excellence for trade and inward investment services and represents the views of over 5,000 businesses in the Thames Valley.

Learn more about TVCC’s policy priorities in our [2025 Business Manifesto](#)