

The Lord Hendy KC  
The Rt Hon Heidi Alexander, Secretary of State for  
Transport

Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group

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Dear Secretary of State,

### **Heathrow Express and Western Rail Link to London Heathrow (WRLtH)**

The Government's (HMG) announcement, in November 2025, supporting Heathrow's third runway scheme is a pivotal milestone for expansion and the delivery of surface access improvements, such as WRLtH.

#### Heathrow Express (HEX)

On behalf of the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC) I am writing to you to outline our strong support for retaining the HEX paths, the links to surface access and extending the current service beyond 2028.

The case for retention includes:

- The demonstrable opportunity for delivering the WRLtH whilst minimising reliance on the public purse. Control of HEX is an essential lever for any private investor in rail surface access to secure a return on their investment (ROI). HMG needs to ensure that the private sector has incentive and certainty to invest. Control of and future use of the HEX paths is a critical part of that case, and it is vital that that opportunity is retained.
- Heathrow's need to deliver a credible, deliverable Surface Access Strategy (SAS) that meets the targets the airport needs to measure, including new rail infrastructure and net zero targets, that benefit customers and enable the UK's only hub airport to compete with the world's foremost airports.
- Maximising the benefits that drive economic growth and wider investment in UK plc.
- Enabling Heathrow Airport Limited's (HAL) delivery of a comprehensive SAS that can drive investment in new rail schemes to Heathrow (specifically we state – WRLtH) to drive public transport mode share increased needed for airport expansion.

#### WRLtH (Context)

[Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce's](#) (TVCC) has been a longstanding advocate for the timely delivery of the WRLtH scheme. In our opinion its delivery is an essential component of expanding Heathrow. It is also a standalone project that, evidently, will deliver a return on investment and provide a viable solution to access (to Heathrow) for over 14 million people.

For your information and attention, among others, we refer to previous submissions to HMG:

- [Comprehensive Spending Review Call for Evidence](#) (February 2025)
- [Planning and Infrastructure Bill](#) (April 2025)
- [Letter to the Secretary of State for Transport](#) (Louise Haig, MP) (July 2024)

Currently, there is no direct rail access to Heathrow from towns and cities such as Swindon, Bristol, Cardiff, Gloucester, Oxford, and Plymouth. This lack of direct connectivity contrasts sharply with most European hub airports which have direct access to communities and businesses. The scheme is a fully developed proposal that will improve the UK's attractiveness for investment, and safeguarded jobs and industry for the UK in an increasingly competitive global economy.

Further, and as [Tan Dhesi, MP and Chair of the APPG for the WRLtH](#) has consistently articulated, it will deliver improved access in time and convenience for around 20% of the UK population and help unleash the economic potential of the southeast, southwest, Wales and south Midlands that drives HMGs Industrial Strategy ambitions.

### Get Britain Moving

As the Secretary of State said in the House of Commons (8<sup>th</sup> July 2025) WRLtH is one of those schemes that *“will transform journeys across the country, improve the passenger experience”*. If ever there was a scheme that is a *“downpayment on future growth, better connectivity, and the new jobs and homes this government has promised”* – it's the WRLtH scheme.

In the same speech, you stated that *“only those projects that are fully costed, affordable and deliver a return on taxpayers' money will be given the green light under my watch.”*

WRLtH is a once-in-a-generation commitment, you can make happen; to get Britain moving and a new rail link will raise living standards, increase opportunity, and deliver on HMGs Plan for Change.

To help achieve this we provide an update on the TVCC's work, and on our ongoing, positive, discussions, with your department.

### WRLtH (Refreshed Economic Study)

TVCC has commissioned a revised business case for the scheme (Phase I report), super-seeding the study produced by Network Rail and adopted by DfT and Treasury in 2019. Our analysis shows that the scheme can be delivered based on a 2R airport with the majority of investment coming from the private sector. The scheme is even more attractive to the private sector based on a 3R airport and [we are optimistic](#) the scheme can progress, with appetite shown already from potential investors. We have presented our report to DfT colleagues and, with your department's assistance, now have a DfT/HM Treasury briefing scheduled for 18<sup>th</sup> February.

Linking back to HEx, our proposed business model, and service design is partly dependent on use of the HEx paths and a potential integration of services. WRLtH will enable through trains to London and greater resilience of the rail network from the west. If services cannot run through the airport but terminate at T5 or another terminal this will likely hinder frequent, efficient services, and cause congestion and delay to rail services running within, to and from the airport. This will in turn have an adverse impact on passenger take up, modal shift and environmental benefits.

In short, the loss of the paths or overall service before WRLtH is in service could undermine both the finances and benefits of our proposal. It could also undermine related surface access proposals.

We now have business/local government appetite to commission a Phase II report which will focus on the direct economic benefits of the WRLtH scheme to towns such as Swindon, Oxford, Didcot, Slough, and Reading. Subject to funding being secured for the study phase we will assess how the scheme will unlock the full potential of major growth / investment hubs, such as Oxford North, Oxford Science Park and ARC Oxford (linked to the new Cowley Branch line, Harwell Campus and Culham AI Growth Zone, both near Didcot and the Panattoni Park, Swindon. We have already secured commitment to fund part of the full costs of the Phase II study, and we are looking for further funding commitments, including may we ask from DfT/HMT to match-fund?

#### Expansion at Heathrow and SAS

[TVCC supports the expansion at Heathrow](#) as HMGs flagship infrastructure project to drive long-term economic growth, subject to the delivery of mitigation of the environmental impact within their plans, including the SAS.

To secure commitment to the next phase, HAL must demonstrate that mitigation and produce a credible, deliverable SAS. We understand the SAS must demonstrate how HAL will:

- Meet the public transport targets within the ANPS.
- Deliver rail access, particularly to those areas without direct access to the airport (i.e. the entire catchment of WRLtH) as an essential component to achieving the necessary modal shift and to serve, sustainable, passenger growth.

HAL has made a case that the retention of HEx is a key element of its current and future SAS because it protects their direct control over pricing, service quality, passenger experience, and marketing to ensure passengers choose rail over the comfort of a private mode. These factors will enable Heathrow to make choices that help to achieve the ANPS targets and move 40m people onto public transport.

HEx also offers a differentiated rail service, particularly attractive to customers who would otherwise revert to the car and comparable with services expected at other international hub airports.

This is/will be important to unlocking and enable private investment into expansion and unlock the multiplier national GDP benefits which expansion will deliver for UK plc. Crucially, it is contradictory to these positions and detrimental to the attractiveness of any private investment, if HMG were to take HEx into public ownership which reduces the attractiveness of any scheme (including WRLtH) to investors and removes one of the direct means by which a private investor could seek to secure a return on their investment.

HMG must ensure the conditions are right and play their part in delivering the rail services which would realise these benefits. We believe there is no compelling reason why current arrangements should change.

#### Benefits to UK plc of an expanded, more accessible airport

Heathrow is [one of the world's most connected airports](#) and the [UK's largest port by value](#) with a network of over 230 destinations worldwide in around 85 countries.

It provides hub access to much of the UK's regional airport network and a vital link to London. Across the Thames Valley, and beyond, we know from our own direct evidence, that connectivity to Heathrow plays a significant part in driving the inward investment and the trade flows that generates wealth and economic prosperity.

As I believe you have emphasised, improving transport connectivity is central to HMGs economic growth agenda. A credible, deliverable, and comprehensive SAS, the continuation of the HEx service, and the delivery

of rail improvements, such as WRLtH, are essential to delivering this investment, growth, and wider stimulant to regeneration.

Yours sincerely,



**Paul Britton**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and Industry**

### **WRLtH Benefits**

The original business case for WRLtH received DfT and Treasury approval in 2019, subject only to conclusion of a funding agreement. A funding agreement splitting the cost between HAL and HMG in the final stages of negotiation after which a DCO application would have been submitted in spring 2020. Covid and other events in 2020 put the project on hold. The benefits to UK plc include:

- Economic growth, inward investment, regeneration, and new jobs across multiple regions
- Mitigation of the airport's environmental impact, contributing to the UK's climate change targets
- Improved freight access to the UK's biggest port by value
- Increased inbound tourism opportunities
- Increased opportunity for international research.

Outcome measures include:

- £800m increase in economic activity
- £1.5 bn in business efficiency savings
- 42,000 new jobs
- Reduced CO2 emissions equivalent to 30 million fewer road miles per year

### **About TVCC**

TVCC is the only accredited Chamber of Commerce for Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxford-shire, and Swindon and one of the largest of the 51 Accredited Chambers of Commerce in the British Chambers of Commerce network. TVCC has provided services and support to the Thames Valley business community as an a-political, not for profit organisation, for over 75 years.

We serve over 4000 active international trade customers and members, one of the largest representations of major multinational employers and international trading SMEs in the British Chamber of Commerce network.