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Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

9th January 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

RE: HATF Support for high capacity rail schemes to Heathrow

Firstly, many congratulations on your recent reappointment. I'm writing to request a meeting with you or one of your ministerial team to discuss the urgent need for securing the delivery of the Western Rail Link and other high capacity rail schemes to Heathrow Airport.

You may be aware that I am the independent chair of the Heathrow Area Transport Forum (HATF). The Forum is established under DfT Guidance and made up of key stakeholders with an interest and involvement in surface transport issues as they relate to Heathrow Airport and the surrounding area and sub region. We are tasked with engaging with Heathrow and key partners to promote the improvement of surface transport to and from the airport, to support achievement of National Policy Statement targets for Heathrow - most notably the target for modal shift away from private car usage - and to monitor the delivery of Heathrow's surface access strategy.

HATF's Board has recently reviewed progress on all the rail schemes proposed to serve an expanded Heathrow, and I wanted to draw your attention to some of our key observations and concerns. We are particularly concerned with the delay in submitting a Development Consent Order for the Western Rail Link to Heathrow.

The importance of improving public transport to the airport

It is widely accepted by all participants in the debate about airport expansion – as well as being stated within the Government’s Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS) - that passengers and staff accessing Heathrow airport are currently dramatically overdependent on private cars. At present only 38% of passenger trips are by public transport and the figure for the workforce is even lower at 26%. Consequently, the airport and its surroundings suffer from extremely poor air quality and high levels of road congestion, which also contributes significantly to Heathrow’s carbon footprint. Reducing the use of unsustainable transport modes - ie cars - should be an urgent priority in the era of the Climate Change emergency.

To achieve the required modal shift targets (from private cars to public transport, walking and cycling) outlined within the ANPS as well as the consequent reduction in emissions and traffic congestion, there needs to be a significant increase in the number of passengers utilising public transport. We note that with an expanded airport the number of public transport passengers is required to double to 50.5million (or 55% of mode share).

Our view, therefore, is that expansion of the airport should only be considered alongside a clear commitment to provide new high capacity rail access as a core component of the airport’s surface access strategy. This includes delivery of the Western and Southern rail links, the full Piccadilly Line Upgrade, and delivery of HS2 and Old Oak Common Interchange.

HATF are of the view that all of these rail schemes need to be firmly committed prior to the third runway becoming fully operational and should therefore form part of the airport’s Environmentally Managed Growth commitments. While we view all these schemes as an essential component of an expanded airport, we also believe that even under the current two runway scenario their development is necessitated by the need to improve public transport to encourage mode shift and reduce the environmental impacts of poor air quality, congestion and carbon emissions.

Western Rail Link to Heathrow

We are concerned that the Development Consent Order (DCO) for the Western Rail Scheme, which was due to be submitted in 2019, has been delayed. We are also concerned that there is currently no clear funding commitment from either HAL or Government to the scheme. This leaves delivery of this critical scheme uncertain.

Whether or not the airport is expanded, HATF see the delivery of Western Rail as an essential component of the airport’s surface access strategy. We urge Government and HAL to show a clear funding commitment for delivering this scheme as a matter of urgency, and seek your reassurance that the DCO for this scheme will be submitted at the earliest opportunity.

We note that partly as a result of the CAA's recent determination on HAL's funding for early expansion works, the expansion programme is itself now delayed to 2029. We are concerned that this may also result in Western Rail being delayed, particularly if funding for Western Rail is viewed to be dependent on the expansion.

In general, it is our view that the CAA's economic regulatory function seems to only take a limited account of the environmental impact of the airport's expansion, especially in the context of funding surface access enhancements. We do not think it appropriate if funding for Western Rail, particularly any contribution from HAL, is dependent on the airport's expansion.

Southern Rail Link to Heathrow

The HATF Board also strongly supports the concept of a Southern Rail Link to Heathrow that can deliver the eight strategic objectives published by DfT in November 2019. As well as supporting the modal ANPS targets, the link will help ensure the economic benefits of the airport can be realised across large regions of the country that currently have poor access to the airport. However, the lack of clear and linear progress on this scheme means that despite many years of planning, the scheme is still at no more than an outline concept and therefore still a very long way from delivery.

HATF Board members would like Government to provide, prior to HAL's DCO for the airport's expansion, an explicit commitment towards a Southern Rail Link, with a clear programme outlining its pathway from a concept to a committed scheme. Equally we would like to see more commitment from HAL as part of its own DCO application to help fund and deliver this essential scheme. It is vital that the detailed development of a preferred option for this scheme is expediated.

Piccadilly Line Upgrade

Sadly, the financial burden caused by the overrunning of Crossrail 1 construction has contributed to the current stalling of plans for a significant upgrade of the Piccadilly Line. Whilst current funding and plans are in place to install some new Piccadilly Line rolling stock, which will improve capacity by 23%, proposals to upgrade signals and trains to deliver an additional 41% capacity by 2030 are stalled due to lack of funding. The impact this will have on surface access at Heathrow, particularly with expansion, is significant.

HATF supports TfL's, and the business communities' representations to the Government for a commitment to funding of the phase 2 Piccadilly Line upgrade which we consider to be another essential element of the airports surface access strategy.

High Speed 2 (HS2)

HATF Board strongly supports the provision of HS2 given that, combined with an interchange at Old Oak Common, it will significantly improve access to Heathrow from the Midlands and the North.

I would be very grateful to have an opportunity to meet with you or a member of your ministerial team to explain the work of HATF. and to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely,



Val Shawcross CBE
Independent Chair
Heathrow Area Transport Forum