

Chris Heaton-Harris  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Tuesday 8th December 2020

Dear Minister,

**Western Rail Link to Heathrow**

I am writing to you in my capacity as the Independent Chair of the Heathrow Area Transport Forum (HATF), to reassert the Forum's strong support for the Western Rail Link to Heathrow scheme and to seek reassurances that the additional years' delay to the scheme, announced on Monday 7th December, will not presage the demise of the scheme.

More than 70 key transport, local authority and business stakeholders regularly take part in activities hosted by the Heathrow Area Transport Forum. The HATF board, has been working closely with Heathrow, airlines, local authorities, LEPs and other key stakeholders to develop a revised long-term surface access strategy for Heathrow that is able to account for short, medium- and long-term impacts of recent events.

The importance of the WRLtH scheme is a uniting theme across all of these diverse organisations. It enjoys enthusiastic support cross Party, within and outside of London and spanning the public and private sectors. The WRLtH scheme is a central plank of the revised '2- runway' surface access strategy for Heathrow. All stakeholders are clear that whether or not the airport is expanded, the WRLtH scheme is an essential priority for both the airport and the regions.

Despite its relatively small scale and limited costs the scheme will bring a number of strategic local, regional and national benefits:

- WRLtH is a building block to improve the local environment, to promote public transport and modal shift away from private car traffic. It will assist in the drive for net zero carbon and in the reduction of dangerous traffic-based air pollution, providing a reduction in CO2 equivalent to removing 30 million road miles per year.
- It will support Highways England's objective of promoting the decongestion of major highways, supporting a modal shift from road to rail that will remove over 1 million car journeys from some of the most congested roads around Heathrow.
- It will improve surface access to Heathrow by both its workforce and passenger markets. Network Rail's consultation found that over 70% of local people supported the scheme.

- Significantly, it will promote economic growth in the West and South West of the UK, including more deprived communities in Cornwall and South Wales. The scheme benefits much more than just the airport and local region. It will provide widespread transformational benefits across large parts of the country. As such it can help play a key role in the Government's 'levelling up' agenda. Work by Network Rail and local authorities has shown that WRLtH will provide a significant boost to the UK economy, generating an additional £1.5 billion economic activity and helping generate 42,000 jobs.

WRLtH will be a key component in promoting local and national economic recovery from the devastating effects of the Covid pandemic. The Aviation industry has been red flagged as one of the most seriously affected sectors. The local workforce in the vicinity of Heathrow are suffering from redundancies and growing unemployment as jobs within Heathrow and in the businesses that serve it are cut. Low paid workers who serve the airport and its connected businesses and who enjoy less financial resilience, feature prominently amongst those suffering from the economic devastation caused by the pandemic.

I strongly urge that the government takes every possible step to ensure that the WRLtH scheme goes ahead at the earliest possible opportunity so that its benefits can assist in the recovery from the economic devastation wrought by Covid 19.

Yours sincerely,



**Val Shawcross CBE**  
Independent Chair  
Heathrow Area Transport Forum