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Programme Office  
c/o Buckinghamshire County Council  
County Hall  
Walton Street  
Aylesbury  
HP20 1UA

10<sup>th</sup> August 2017

Network Rail  
FREEPOST EAST WEST RAIL CONSULTATION

Dear Sir,

**EAST WEST RAIL, WESTERN SECTION  
TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance established the Strategic Transport Forum in February 2016. Membership of the Strategic Alliance covers the area from Oxfordshire, through Milton Keynes and across to Cambridgeshire, and from Northamptonshire across to Luton.

The Strategic Transport Forum is the focus for a single conversation on strategic transport issues across the Heartland and maintains the overview of strategic investment priorities. The Forum is the emerging Sub-national Transport Body (STB) for the Heartland area.

The Department for Transport's recently published Transport Investment Strategy emphasises the importance of STBs in providing local partners with the opportunity to shape future strategic investment priorities.

The Strategic Transport Forum at its meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2017 confirmed that the delivery of the Western Section remains an immediate investment priority (one of five) for England's Economic Heartland. The Forum therefore confirms its support for East West Rail (EWR) Phase 2 (the Western Section) as presented at the recent public consultation meetings.

The National Infrastructure Commission's (NIC) Interim Report of November 2016 identified the economic potential of the East – West Corridor to be the UK's Silicon Valley. It further stated that new strategic east-west links provide an opportunity to support this, but to do so the Government should commit to delivering the Western Section of the EWR project before 2024 (the end of the rail industry's Control Period 6).

Improved connectivity was one of two critical issues identified by the NIC as needing to be addressed in order to realise the economic potential of the corridor. This could see the corridor's economy grow by a factor of between two to three times the current value; a scale much greater than previously envisaged: such an agenda is truly transformative and needs appropriate infrastructure.

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Moreover the NIC identified EWR (in its entirety) as part of a 'once-in-a-generation' opportunity to create a multi-modal spine along the Oxford – Milton Keynes – Cambridge corridor that will help address the need for improved connectivity and support the preparation of an ambitious long-term strategy for the development of the corridor.

The Forum has also explicitly identified how the scheme opens up the opportunity to improve north-south connectivity – in particular along the Northampton – Milton Keynes – Aylesbury – High Wycombe – Old Oak Common corridor, facilitated by the opening of HS2 in 2026. Network Rail's recently published Chiltern and East West Railway Route Study further highlights the importance of this strategic corridor in the short/medium term. Improved rail access to the growth hub at Old Oak Common/Park Royal is of strategic importance for both England's Economic Heartland and the London Mayor.

The Forum's support is conditional upon the full scope of EWR Western Section - as articulated in the Consortium's 2011 Prospectus - being delivered as the minimum infrastructure. This includes the upgrading of the Line between Aylesbury and Calvert Junction, the provision of a new station at Winslow, train services stopping at Winslow and Aylesbury Vale Parkway and delivery of enhancements to the Marston Vale Line necessary to enable train services from Oxford to Bedford.

All these critical elements of rail infrastructure must be delivered in one go as a single enabling piece of infrastructure. This is necessary to provide the confidence in EWR that allows Local Plans to be prepared with greater certainty and gives confidence to private sector investors that they can plan their developments on the basis that EWR will be there. It is also worth noting that an added value of delivering EWR at the earliest possible opportunity is to provide rail based access for construction activity related to HS2.

Confidence in the scheme being delivered is particularly important to enable Local Planning Authorities to prepare their draft Local Plans with confidence and to support them in the subsequent stages (examination in public) where the availability of strategic infrastructure will be a key consideration in determining the soundness of the draft Local Plans.

The Forum supports the EWR Consortium's position that the train services put forward in their 2011 Prospectus should be provided as an absolute minimum. It is essential that in taking the scheme forward the design enables future expansion of the infrastructure to accommodate higher levels of service at marginal cost. In addition, the Forum emphasises the importance of ensuring that the infrastructure delivered has the capability to be upgraded at marginal cost should there be a case for providing additional freight paths.

The Forum strongly encourages Network Rail and the Department for Transport to work with the EWR Consortium to explore the potential to deliver a Bletchley Eastern Entrance (as an enabling piece of infrastructure delivered at marginal cost) and the potential to realise a transport hub at Ridgmont (in support of potential growth identified in the draft Local Plan).

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Finally, the Forum is very much aware of the work commissioned by the Secretary of State tasked with seeking to deliver EWR faster and at less cost. The Forum welcomes this initiative as further evidence of the Government's commitment to deliver EWR at the earliest possible opportunity. It welcomes the way in which the Department for Transport works closely with the EWR Consortium in achieving what is a shared objective.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H Smith', written in a cursive style.

**Cllr Heather Smith**

Chair, Strategic Transport Forum

Leader Northamptonshire County Council

