

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE		
DATE:	12 SEPTEMBER 2018	AGENDA ITEM:	9
TITLE:	NETWORK RAIL PROPOSED WESTERN LINK TO HEATHROW - CONSULTATION RESPONSE		
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**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report sets out the Council's response to the Network Rail consultation on the 'Proposed Western Rail Link to Heathrow' that seeks to improve accessibility to Heathrow Airport based on existing airport capacity.
- 1.2 Appendix A - Response to Network Rail's consultation on the 'Proposed Western Rail Link to Heathrow'.

**2. RECOMMENDED ACTION**

- 2.1 To note the Council's consultation response included in Appendix A.

**3. POLICY CONTEXT**

- 3.1 The Council's position on Heathrow expansion is set out in the Council Motion adopted in January 2014. This recognises the economic and employment benefits to Reading of Heathrow, accepts the importance of retaining the world's busiest hub airport in its current location, and accepts the need identified by Government for some expansion of airport capacity in the South East. However, the Motion includes caveats for expansion including the need for significant enhancement to sustainable surface access to the airport and the requirement for environmental concerns of local residents to be fully addressed.
- 3.2 The Network Rail consultation on a proposed Western Rail Link to Heathrow sets out plans to improve surface access to the airport and address the Council's long-term aspiration, outlined in our Local Transport Plan, for improved connectivity to Heathrow Airport from Reading Station and beyond via connecting national rail services.

## 4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Network Rail undertook statutory public consultation on the proposed Western Rail Link to Heathrow, which forms part of their Railway Upgrade Plan, between 11<sup>th</sup> May and 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2018.

4.2 The proposed link between the Great Western Mainline and Heathrow Airport, which would commence between Langley and Iwer via a 5km tunnel and merge with existing railway lines at Heathrow Terminal 5, is anticipated to generate the following benefits:

- Reduce rail journey times between Reading and Heathrow by delivering a new, faster, frequent, more reliable direct train service to Heathrow with four trains per hour in each direction. Journey times could be as short as 26 minutes from Reading and 6 to 7 minutes from Slough.
- Significantly improve rail connectivity to Heathrow from the Thames Valley, South Coast, South West, South Wales and West Midlands.
- Provide an alternative form of transport for passengers and the large number of people who work at the airport who are currently travelling by road.
- Ease congestion on roads, including the M4, M3 and M25 resulting in lower CO2 emissions equivalent to approximately 30 million road miles per year.
- Generate economic growth and new jobs across the Thames Valley and surrounding areas.
- Reduce passenger congestion at London Paddington.

4.3 The Committee is asked to note the response to the Network Rail consultation as set out in **Appendix A**, which strongly supports the proposals for improved railway connectivity to Heathrow from Reading Station and its economic importance to the Thames Valley region.

4.4 It should be noted that the Network Rail consultation on Western Access to Heathrow is based on existing airport capacity. A separate consultation was undertaken by Heathrow on the proposed expansion and airspace principles between 17<sup>th</sup> January and 28<sup>th</sup> March 2018. Feedback from the latter consultation is currently being analysed and further consultation is expected to be undertaken by Heathrow on more detailed proposals in 2019.

4.5 Other surface access improvements are being considered as part of Heathrow expansion proposals in response to the draft Airports National Policy Statement (NPS). The Statement sets out the requirement for any development consent and Surface Access Strategy to include details of how it will increase the proportion of journeys made to the airport by public transport, cycling and walking to at least 50% by 2030 and at least 55% by 2040 for passengers.

## 5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The delivery of a Western Access to Heathrow supports the following Corporate Plan priorities:

1. Securing the economic success of Reading and provision of job opportunities
2. Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe

5.2 Improved connectivity to Heathrow Airport from Reading Station also supports the strategic objective:

- To Develop Reading as a Green City with a sustainable environment and economy at the heart of the Thames Valley.

## **6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 6.1 Network Rail undertook informal consultation in 2015 and 2016, before carrying out a final round of statutory public consultation between 11<sup>th</sup> May and 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2018. Responses from the consultation are now being analysed by Network Rail, who anticipate publishing final plans and additional consultation events in early 2019.

## **7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 In addition to the Human Rights Act 1998 the Council is required to comply with the Equalities Act 2010. Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to:-
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2 It will be the responsibility of Network Rail to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment at the relevant time.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 None relating to this report.

## **9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 None relating to this report.

## **10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 10.1 Network Rail Consultation on Western Rail Link to Heathrow - <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/our-railway-upgrade-plan/key-projects/heathrow-rail-link/>.
- 10.2 Heathrow Expansion & Airspace Principles Consultation - Council Response, SEPT Committee, March 2018.
- 10.3 Airports Commission Interim Report - Council Motion, Council, January 2014.

**APPENDIX A**  
**WESTERN RAIL LINK TO HEATHROW CONSULTATION**

Reading Borough Council has consistently supported the proposals and project development to progress the planned rail link from the Great Western mainline at Langley to Heathrow. Reading Borough Council is therefore pleased that the formal consultation is now taking place and again would like to stress the importance to the Thames Valley economic region and Reading, of the planned rail link.

Heathrow is one of the busiest airports in the world and many businesses and homes are located in the Thames Valley specifically to be near to the airport. However the success of the airport has generated huge volumes of road traffic to and from the airport in the absence currently of any direct rail link. This volume of traffic affects towns and villages not only in the area around Heathrow but at locations all along the M4 and A4 corridors through the Thames Valley. Air quality and congestion issues in parts of East and South Reading itself are adversely affected by car journeys starting out for the airport from the local area. The planned direct rail link with 4 trains an hour serving Slough and Reading and two each serving Maidenhead and Twyford will provide a new safe, fast and reliable alternative to car commuting and travel access to the airport, and help reduce emissions and improve air quality.

Reading Station has been rebuilt to provide additional capacity for new train services and to enable easy interchange from the Heathrow trains to the many other services radiating from the Reading rail hub. The new rail link will therefore provide the best connectivity possible from a vast area of the western Thames Valley and throughout the West of England and Wales to Heathrow, in the most energy efficient and least polluting way possible.

The introduction of the Heathrow to Reading service will provide a further stimulus on economic prosperity and UK wealth generation in the least environmentally polluting and damaging way possible. It is expected that the service will significantly reduce the numbers of cars accessing the airport from all across the Thames Valley region.

Reading Borough Council enthusiastically supports the scheme and looks forward to its swift and efficient construction and delivery. In the context of scheme delivery Reading Borough Council notes the dilatory way in which electrification of the GWML has been carried out and would encourage Central Government to ensure that adequate checks and supervision processes are in place to ensure that the Heathrow rail link is constructed and delivered in the most time and cost efficient way possible, together with causing the least amount of disruption to those living and working close to the construction sites. The construction of Reading Station showed that such working and project management is possible and thus we would encourage close collaboration with the local authority to ensure a similar outcome.