

NOTICE OF MOTION – CLLR I JOHNSON – HEATHROW RAIL LINK

Executive Summary

At its meeting on 25 July 2019, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor I Johnson

“That this Council:

- 1) Notes the UK Government’s invitation in May 2019 for market-led proposals for a new rail link connecting Heathrow Airport from the south and Waterloo and Surrey/Hampshire and this Council’s long-term aspiration for a direct rail link to Heathrow Airport;
- 2) supports action to benefit the environment by minimising traffic and pollution by transferring journeys from road to rail;
- 3) welcomes the initiative of Heathrow Southern Railway to propose a project involving a direct rail link from Woking to Heathrow Airport including significant sections via tunnels to minimise environmental impact; and
- 4) asks the Council to write to the Member of Parliament for Woking to press the Secretary of State for Transport to expedite the process of approving a project and selecting a preferred developer, and to advise members when this has been done.”

Officer Comment

“Woking Borough Council has been a key advocate for a direct rail access to Heathrow that stops at Woking. Indeed the Council played a leading role in making the case for the then Airtrack proposal before it was abandoned mainly due to lack of funding. The Council has continued to make the case and had done so recently on the back of the consultation on the national policy framework for the Heathrow Airport expansion. In this regard, the Council welcomes the Government’s acknowledgement of the need to improve surface access to and from Heathrow as part of the infrastructure to support the proposed Heathrow expansion. It is however regrettable that the southern rail access is not being promoted as an integral part of the Heathrow expansion proposal and a pre-requisite to the operation of the expanded airport to be funded by Heathrow Airport Limited and Central Government. It is necessary that the delivery of the southern rail access is aligned with the implementation of the Heathrow expansion to avoid any intolerable traffic conditions for local residents and businesses. There is the risk that the delivery of the southern rail access would lag behind the Heathrow expansion if they are not delivered as an integrated package. Whilst the Government’s invitation for a market led proposal for the link is not entirely what the Council would have wanted, it is certainly a positive step forward towards achieving a long held objective of the Council.

There is no reason to doubt the capability of Heathrow Southern Railway Limited to deliver the project. However, it would be pre-mature for the Council to declare support for a particular bidder until it has had the opportunity to study the bid(s) in detail. The Government is yet to publish guidelines for the southern rail connection to Heathrow against which bids would be assessed. Officers understand that the publication of the guidelines could be soon. It will be helpful to wait and study the guidelines before deciding whether or not to support a particular bid.

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It should be noted for information that Officers have already met one of the consortiums who are seeking to submit a bid to deliver the project. Officers have also corresponded with the local Member of Parliament regarding the Council's continuing support for the southern rail access. In this regard, Council should support the motion except for bullet point (3) above for the reasons given."

Background Papers: None.

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Date Published: 2 October 2019