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Date: 10th January 2019

Dear Secretary of State

Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

I am writing in my capacity as Chair of the Strategic Transport Forum, the Sub National Transport Body for the Oxford – Milton Keynes – Cambridge Arc.

As a Forum, we welcome your continued commitment to investing in the right strategic infrastructure to unlock growth in the Heartland area. However, we are increasingly concerned with the Government's approach to the Oxford – Cambridge 'expressway' project, and particularly the way the section between Oxford and Milton Keynes is being planned.

Collectively, we are committed to the shared ambition to deliver the once in a generation opportunity that currently exists for the area between Oxford and Cambridge. As local partners we are rising to the challenge by working with your officials to move forward, including the development of the overarching Transport Strategy for the Arc.

Realising the scale of opportunity identified by the National Infrastructure Commission will not be achieved by adopting a 'business as usual approach' to the way we plan for and deliver strategic infrastructure.

We recognise the significant commitment you have made to investing in our roads, including the proposed expressway project. However, in developing options for improved connectivity between Oxford and Cambridge, we firmly believe that what is required is broader consideration of the strategic infrastructure required in support of a 21st century economy.

The Government has stated that realising the potential of the Arc needs to achieve environmental "net gain" overall and that this requires an integrated approach to the planning and delivery of infrastructure, homes and business growth.

This is entirely the right approach. Our work on the overarching Transport Strategy is underpinned by the vision of "connecting our people and places with opportunities and services", and an ambition to achieve a zero-carbon transport system by 2050.

Your commitment to accelerate the delivery of the East West Rail project is entirely in line with this vision.

In looking to the long term strategic transport requirements, the Forum has noted that the Western Section of East West Rail will be open at least 10 years, and potentially the entire

rail route between Oxford and Cambridge could be open some 5 years, in advance of the proposed expressway. England's Economic Heartland is already working with officials in DfT, DCMS and Network Rail to ensure that the Western Section is delivered as a digitally connected corridor – benefiting not only rail passengers but the surrounding area.

Taken together these investments will significantly improve overall levels of connectivity in ways that will benefit both residents and businesses: they represent significant opportunities to deliver growth in ways consistent with the ambition of environmental “net gain” overall. We must not risk inadvertently undermining progress in this regard through subsequent investments in the road network, such as the expressway.

In taking forward our work on the overarching Transport Strategy we are using the Regional Evidence Base (established to underpin the Forum's advice on future investment priorities). This will ensure that our advice on investment priorities supports the delivery of planned growth set out in Local Plans and Local Industrial strategies.

We recognise that the funding available from Government to invest in our road network is finite. It is therefore all the more important to ensure that where funding is available to invest, it is targeted in ways that maximise the benefit to our local communities and businesses (both existing and future).

Delivering the growth already planned for the area between Oxford and Milton Keynes will require significant investment in our existing road network. This need for this investment already exists but is unfunded. In this context we continue to be disappointed at the lack of a decision in respect of our submission for 'early entries' to the Major Road Network programme.

We are clear that significant investment in our road network will continue to be an essential part of the package required to enable not just planned growth but higher levels of growth in the long term. It is therefore essential that a proposal to invest in the 'expressway' is developed in the context of an overarching Transport Strategy that considers not only the timing and benefits of investment in other modes, but also other strategic infrastructure.

Our submission to the 2018 Budget set out the benefit of setting an indicative funding envelope for public sector investment in strategic transport infrastructure. We do not underestimate that there will be difficult choices for Government to make in terms of how best to use the funding available to enable the delivery of planned growth. However as the Sub-national Transport Body, we are committed to working with you and your officials to arrive at the best strategic choices.

We are concerned that the approach to date with the 'expressway' is taking place in isolation of these wider considerations. And as such we are concerned that the expressway proposal, as it currently stands, may not be consistent with the wider strategic objectives for the Arc.

Such are the nature of the Forum's concerns that I would like to meet you in person as a matter of urgency to discuss and agree a way forward.

As a final point, the Forum continues to support the need to make urgent progress with the delivery of other aspects of the 'expressway' – in particular the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet. Perhaps we can discuss opportunities to accelerate its delivery when we meet?

Yours sincerely



Mayor Dave Hodgson
Chair, Strategic Transport Forum

