



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon. Grant Shapps MP  
Secretary of State for Transport  
Department for Transport  
Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London  
SW1P 4DR

18<sup>th</sup> September 2019

Ref: AL/TG/1909

Dear Grant,

I appreciate that diary constraints for both of us have necessitated our meeting today being rescheduled, and I understand that my office has offered 5pm on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> October as the next available opportunity. I very much look forward to seeing you then so I might raise several pressing constituency concerns with you, and thought it helpful to set these out in more detail, should you have chance to consider each issue ahead of that meeting.

**Strategic Rail Freight Interchanges**

You will be aware that in South Northamptonshire we have two concurrent proposals for strategic rail freight interchanges; Northampton Gateway sponsored by Roxhill, and Rail Central by Ashfield Land. The two SRFI sites are located either side of the Northampton Loop Line where it branches from the West Coast Main Line south of Northampton, and are in competition with each other for available freight paths on the WCML, capacity on the local road network for HGV and worker movements, and will have a cumulative impact on the environment.

Northampton Gateway is currently with you for a go / no go decision on the Development Consent Order, following the completion of the Planning Inspectorate's examination of the proposals and its subsequent recommendation to you; Rail Central has not yet held its Preliminary Meeting for the start of the examination process, and has asked for a further delay for this until December 2020 due to material and fundamental concerns about the viability of the project. I appreciate that you cannot comment on the specifics of either proposal, however I would like to raise some general concerns about SRFIs with you.

Over the last few years, I have held a number of meetings with Ministers in your Department as well as with Network Rail to discuss SRFI policy; many of these meetings have been attended by a small number of my constituents, including Professor Andrew Gough of University of Northampton who is a specialist in freight and logistics.

*Member of Parliament for South Northamptonshire*



Professor Gough's view is that investment in new SRFIs should normally follow freight investment in a rail corridor, where there is additional capacity already available for new projects, rather than preceding this investment. He feels there is a disconnect between the National Policy Statement for Ports and the National Policy Statement for National Networks in terms of rail connectivity; this was highlighted in the recent publication of Maritime 2050, which refers to maritime taking its place in the wider supply chain yet without any reference to SRFIs, and with the term "rail freight" appearing only four times. Professor Gough has made the further point that there is a compelling need for a single UK Freight Policy which could be connected to overall decarbonisation and air quality targets.

He is also concerned that the majority of current SRFI schemes are premature: 1) there is a reliance on future network capacity to deliver modal shift; 2) there is a lack of clarity on the design of the proposed rail elements through GRIP, which he thinks should be developed to at least GRIP 3, if not GRIP 4, prior to examination by PINS. His view is that Network Rail is forced to react to developer activity, not promote it, nor is Network Rail working in partnership with developers.

Current SRFI schemes can be viewed as opportunistic reworkings of road-based schemes, not true SRFIs. Professor Gough feels that further guidance on these points to developers would enhance the viability of any given scheme in terms of modal shift, and focus SRFI locations to sites which already have the potential for expansion that the NPS NN requires.

I enclose two additional documents: a briefing prepared in 2016 by one of the local action groups that sets out strategic concerns about the NPS NN and freight modelling, and a shorter briefing prepared in advance of the meeting we were to have today. I hope that these are helpful; however, should you have specific questions or queries about any of the content, I know that Professor Gough would be delighted to expand on these points in more detail.

Again, whilst not discussing any specific SRFI proposal, I did want to seek your guidance on what the impact may be of a delay to HS2, or a possible cancellation of the project following the Oakervee Review, on available and projected capacity on the West Coast Main Line. This is particularly relevant where the business case for an SRFI has been predicated upon new freight capacity on the WCML being made available by HS2, which now will not become apparent for many more years.

I would also be grateful for your guidance on what powers are available to your Department, or to the Planning Inspectorate, in circumstances where a developer has proposed an SRFI project, but has subsequently failed to put forward for the start of the examination process. In those circumstances, residents in the surrounding area are constantly blighted by whether a proposal will or will not be put to PINS, especially when the developer seeks to continually defer the Preliminary Meeting and is unable to meet pre-agreed milestone targets as established by PINS.

Your thoughts on these points on SRFIs ahead of our meeting in October would be very much appreciated by my constituents.



### **Farthinghoe Bypass (A422)**

Thank you very much for your letter of the 11<sup>th</sup> September; this has been warmly received by my constituents in Farthinghoe and the wider area. Your support for our outline proposals to put forward a bid for the Farthinghoe Bypass through the Pinch Point Fund is welcomed, and you will be pleased to know that I held a meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> September with Northamptonshire County Council, England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance (our sub-national transport body), and the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership to discuss our approach in more detail.

We have secured £250k in initial funding from South Northamptonshire District Council to cover the costs of a preliminary route assessment (engineering and environmental works, and traffic and economic considerations), as well as the cost of a route consultation. Given that the County Council has, in the last few years, carried out a consultation to determine preference for a northern route or southern route around the village, with northern being overwhelmingly preferred, the next consultation will work to determine the exact alignment.

All parties have now agreed that this is a top priority locally in South Northamptonshire, and the County Council has agreed to submit an Expression of Interest for Pinch Point Funding to you ahead of the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020 deadline.

I enclose a briefing that has been prepared by the County Council on the Farthinghoe Bypass which sets out the initial timescales for the project; it is very much our anticipation to speed this process up as much as possible however. Since the document was prepared, the funding has been approved by South Northants Council and work on the preliminary route assessment is underway. However, concerns were raised in the meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> September that we would not be able to complete the road by 2022/23, as indicated for disbursement of monies through the Pinch Point Fund. Is it possible to secure a dispensation for the Farthinghoe Bypass, subject to a successful bid for funding, to allow the money to be released outside of the 2021/22 and 2022/23 period?

Additionally, I should be grateful if you could also confirm what, from the briefing note, the Pinch Point Fund would cover, including whether detailed design work would be included, and if there are other ways we could constructively find the money required together. As you may know, Northamptonshire County Council is not in a financial position where it is able to contribute any great sums of money to this project. I am, however, seeking funding from South Northants Council to help take the scheme to a planning decision; this is not guaranteed.

SEMLEP has indicated that the Farthinghoe Bypass might be eligible for funding for the design work, but they couldn't guarantee a successful bid unless we had secured capital funding for the road from your Department. I would be interested to know how this might work in practice, as the approach seems rather "chicken and egg" in terms of who gives what funding first.

My constituents are very grateful for your kind attention to this matter, and I would welcome your further thoughts on the above, particularly around funding for an "oven-ready" scheme.



### **Towcester Relief Road (A5 / A43)**

You will be very pleased to hear that we are making good progress on the early delivery of the Towcester Relief Road, and that the developer, Persimmon, is pressing ahead with Highways England on the detailed design work for the connecting roundabouts on the A5 and A43 which are part of the Strategic Road Network, as well as the designs with Northamptonshire Highways for the relief road itself. You will be aware that Highways England is providing £3.897m of funding through the current Road Investment Strategy to help bring the delivery of the road forward, and Persimmon has agreed to provide the remaining ~£4m in shortfall.

Originally, the relief road was scheduled to be completed upon the construction, sale and occupation of the 1,016<sup>th</sup> house in the new housing development (~3,000 homes) to the south of Towcester. As there was no set timescale for this, the delivery of the road was always subject to prevailing market conditions which meant that the 1,016<sup>th</sup> threshold trigger may not have been met until 2025, 2030, or later. Indeed, there was nothing to stop Persimmon from building and selling 1,015 houses and then downing tools for the next ten years.

The work that I, Persimmon, the District and County Councils have been doing over the past few years to move this project forward and secure the early delivery has been astonishing, and we are now in a much better place than we were when we started. Technical approval from Highways England for roundabout 1 (on the A5) is expected to be obtained by December this year, with technical approval for roundabout 5 by March next year; roundabouts 2, 3 and 4 sit on the relief road itself and are subject to approval by Northamptonshire Highways. The design for the road is to be submitted to Northants Highways by mid-December this year.

Persimmon's expectation is to start construction of the relief road, rather than the connecting roundabouts, by March 2020 to satisfy the deadline set out by Highways England with regard to the RIS funding. To enable the funding mechanism to be progressed, Persimmon will be producing a condensed programme with detailing milestones which will be issued to Highways England; this is hoped will be satisfactory, and the drafting of legal documentation can begin.

However, I am concerned that Highways England is not currently going to allow Persimmon to undertake any works on the Strategic Road Network during the day, meaning a large element of the work will have to be undertaken at night. This is peculiar, given that when it suited Highways England for resurfacing works they closed the A5 through Towcester completely for several months. Should works not be allowed during the day on the SRN this will mean the programme will be far longer than it would otherwise need to be causing further disruption to the residents of Towcester and potentially delaying the opening of the relief road.

We are focused on delivering the road ahead of schedule and by the end of 2021 at the latest, and would welcome your continued support with Highways England to achieve this. I would also like to extend an invitation to you to visit Towcester to view the proceedings, and to meet with representatives from the District and County Council to see our progress for yourself.



## HS2

My constituents have welcomed your decision this week to pause all clearance of ancient woodland along the line-of-route, and entirely agree with you that it is right and proper to prevent irreversible impacts pending the outcome of the Oakervee Review.

I have written to Mark Thurston, with a copy to you, on the 5<sup>th</sup> September asking for all enabling works in South Northamptonshire to be paused pending the outcome of Doug Oakervee's report, and am yet to have a response from HS2 Ltd. I should be grateful if you could give consideration to the points raised in that letter, as there are many areas along the line-of-route that may end up being needlessly disrupted if a recommendation is eventually made to cancel the project.

I will be providing a written submission to Mr Oakervee on behalf of my constituents, and look forward to the outcome of his review.

I do have a number of specific constituency concerns which I will discuss with you in more detail when we meet in October, however the fact remains that HS2 Ltd is perceived as slow at engaging with residents, and determined to frustrate any compensation or mitigation process. I have constituents who have had land possessed but no payments made; others who have secured a new home or site for their business, only to lose it because HS2 Ltd hasn't made timely payments; there are instances where I have had to personally intervene on specific contractual issues between HS2 Ltd and constituents, particularly over rehousing like-for-like.

Whilst I would recognise that our community engagement team is much improved, thanks in no small part to the efforts of our Community Engagement Manager Nisha Mejer, the reality is that the whole organisation of HS2 Ltd seems incapable of acting in good faith, or treating my constituents with respect. The Land and Property team is not fit for purpose.

Thank you for taking the time to consider all of the points I have made. If you are able to provide me with an update ahead of the meeting in October, that would be very helpful, otherwise this letter can form the basis of our discussion and we can go from there.

With best wishes,

The Rt Hon. Andrea Leadsom MP  
Member of Parliament for South Northamptonshire

[Enc.]

Cc: Professor Andrew Gough, University of Northampton  
Cllr Jason Smithers, Northamptonshire County Council  
Cllr Roger Clarke, South Northamptonshire District Council