



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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Ref: AL/TG/1701

Re: Initial Project Information Consultation

I write on behalf of my constituents who are directly and specially affected by the proposals to develop a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI), Northampton Gateway, in my constituency of South Northamptonshire. The majority of these constituents are in Collingtree, Blisworth, Roade, Courteenhall and Grange Park however I have also received concerns from residents of other communities further afield.

I am responding to and engaging with this non-statutory initial project information consultation as the Member of Parliament for South Northamptonshire and any and all comments I make on this application are made solely in that capacity, representing the views of my constituents.

My constituents are grateful that Roxhill has engaged in additional non-statutory consultation phases, however there are a number of immediate concerns that I should like to raise with you on their behalf. At our meeting in early February I hope that you will be able to provide me with additional information and answers to these points ahead of a subsequent public meeting that I intend to hold for local residents in conjunction with Roade Parish Council.

Whilst I am supportive of Government policy to develop SRFIs to maximise the economic, environmental and social benefits of a modal shift in freight from road to rail, it is important to ensure that there is the workforce and housing availability in the local area as well as the track capacity on the rail network. If these conditions are not met, then the viability of a particular SRFI proposal in any one location would be called into question.

The strategic case for developing High Speed Two (HS2) was centred around the need for increased capacity on the West Coast Main Line (WCML)¹, and the current growth rates for that part of the route network forecast that there will be a severe problem by the mid-2020s.

¹ HS2 Ltd | Strategic Case for HS2 | October 2013

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/260525/strategic-case.pdf

Member of Parliament for South Northamptonshire



Virgin Trains and London Midland have indicated that they would have an interest in operating additional passenger services on the WCML, so it is unclear exactly how much spare track capacity there would be for more freight paths once Phase One of HS2 is operational.

In addition to the demand for an increase in passenger services from the franchised train operating companies, there is an existing SRFI – Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT) – just 20 miles up the M1 at the junctions between the motorway, the A5 and the A428. DIRFT is currently undergoing its second expansion, DIRFTIII, and this is not anticipated to be completed until the mid-2030s.

You are of course aware that Ashfield Land has put forward a rival proposal, Rail Central, on the other side of the Northampton Loop Line between Blisworth and Milton Malsor, adjacent to the WCML. The second phase of their public consultation process is due to begin this spring.

Given the expanding rail-connected warehousing capacity being delivered at DIRFT and its growing demands on the route network for increased WCML freight paths, my constituents have questioned the necessity and feasibility of one additional SRFI in the local area, let alone two.

Rail Central and Northampton Gateway would add 8 million sq. ft. and 5 million sq. ft. of warehousing respectively. My constituents have queried whether Northampton Gateway would be similar to Roxhill's East Midlands Gateway SRFI in being rail-served, with freight transported by road-based tractors from the track to the warehouse, or if it would be rail-connected as with DIRFT.

Government policy on SRFIs states that '*as a minimum, a SRFI should be capable of handling four trains per day and, where possible, be capable of increasing the number of trains handled*'². My constituents would like information on how many trains Northampton Gateway proposes to handle per day as well as the daily volume of freight expected to be moved.

A number of my constituents have also pointed out that Northampton Gateway is scheduled to open two years prior to the anticipated completion of Phase One of HS2, and that the freight paths would therefore not be available. I raised this directly with Network Rail in December.

Local residents, particularly those with experience of Rail Central and who are knowledgeable about SRFIs, have asked why no alternative sites to Northampton Gateway appear to have been considered. Alternative site assessments are referred to obliquely by Roxhill in clause 1.2.3 of their Environmental Statement Scoping Report: '*the ES will include information as set out in the Schedule 4 of the 2009 Regulations*'³.

² Department for Transport | Strategic Rail Freight Interchange Policy Guidance | November 2011

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/4377/strategic-rail-freight-interchange.pdf

³ Roxhill | Environmental Statement Scoping Report | October 2016

www.northampton-gateway.co.uk/downloads/scoping_report.pdf



The *Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2009* require projects with significant environmental effects to include an outline of the main alternatives studied by the applicant and an indication of the main reasons for the applicant's choice, taking into account the environmental effects⁴. My understanding of Ashfield Land's ES Scoping Report for Rail Central is that the Secretary of State for Transport welcomed '*the applicant's intention to present the alternatives considered and the reasons for selecting the preferred option*'⁵.

There is a strength of feeling amongst my constituents that the local community would have benefitted from Roxhill expanding on their process for identifying alternative sites ahead of this phase of the consultation. My constituents and I look forward to seeing details of the alternative site assessment for Northampton Gateway as soon as possible.

My constituents also have concerns around availability of local labour, traffic movements, and the consultation process itself.

South Northamptonshire has the 616th lowest claimant rate in the country – 0.7 per cent – and there are not enough people in the local area looking for work to justify such a large-scale development. The workers to fill the jobs that Northampton Gateway would create would have to travel to the site from further afield, and Roxhill has confirmed to my constituents at a public consultation event that this is an area that could extend as far away as Coventry or Leicester. A key aim of the national SRFI policy is to reduce the environmental impact of freight movements by a modal shift from road to rail; my constituents are concerned that this would be undermined by an increase in non-freight traffic from commuting workers.

Our area is undergoing significant development over the next ten years. I have already mentioned the construction of HS2; there is also the expansion of Towcester through the Towcester South Sustainable Urban Extension, an increase in housing provision in Brackley, and other planning proposals across South Northamptonshire. These are all to meet existing housing pressures. All of these developments will require HGVs to access the primary route network and other trunk roads. The M1, A43 and A5 are already brought to a standstill whenever a major incident occurs; additional HGV traffic serving a SRFI would severely impact the capacity of local roads.

Northamptonshire County Council's Northampton Town Transport Strategy aims, with the support of Northamptonshire Highways and Highways England, to address traffic flow problems in the local area⁶. Sustainable transport choices and reducing carbon through tackling congestion are key parts of their policy, and my constituents do not believe the Northampton Gateway proposal is aligned with these priorities.

⁴ Department for Transport | National Policy Statement for National Networks | December 2014

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/387222/npsnn-print.pdf

⁵ The Planning Inspectorate | Environmental Statement Scoping Opinion | January 2016

www.railcentral.com/site/assets/files/1041/scoping_opinion.pdf

⁶ Northamptonshire County Council | Northampton Town Transport Strategy | January 2013

www3.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/northamptonshire-highways/transport-plans-and-policies/Documents/Northampton%20Town%20Transport%20Strategy.pdf



My constituents are concerned that public consultation events to date have been inadequate. Whereas Ashfield Land held events in five locations on eight different days (including weekends), Roxhill's consultations have been in one location on three days during the working week. This prevented many people who have an interest in the proposals from being able to attend or ask questions of the developers. I had the opportunity on Saturday 21st May to go to one of Ashfield Land's events in Blisworth, and I was disappointed to have been unable to come to one with Roxhill due to my parliamentary commitments in the House of Commons.

I am broadly supportive of Roxhill's suggestion to develop a bypass for Roade as part of their application. Many of my constituents have over the years spoken to me about the need to reroute the A508, reducing traffic and relieving congestion in the centre of the village.

However local residents are not convinced that the proposed single carriageway route would be beneficial, and it may be that Roxhill needs to consult more widely on the design and suitability of their proposed route. There are very specific concerns that the bypass would lead to a further loss of the green belt and allow infilling of the land between the road and existing properties.

Thank you for allowing my constituents and me the opportunity to provide you with some initial feedback on your proposals through this non-statutory phase of your consultation process. The views that I have put to you are representative of those that I have received from people in the area and across South Northamptonshire, and I look forward to your response on their behalf.

With best wishes,

Andrea Leadsom

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