



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

Via e-mail: tommy.gilchrist@parliament.uk

28 November 2017

Dear Mrs Leadsom

Thank you for your recent letters (13 November and 18 November). I have consolidated the points raised and sought to provide you with information on these below.

By way of context, it might be valuable to point out that a good deal of work is happening on the scheme as we look to develop technical information to the stage where we can embark on our Phase Two consultation. Much of this technical information – for example road and rail assessments – involves a rigorous process of data collation and, subsequent to that, validation with external and third parties. We intend to publish technical information when it is at an appropriate stage to support consultation and are looking forward to doing that at Phase Two. I appreciate that this process is taking some time but it is important that it is done thoroughly. Releasing information piecemeal or at interim points in the process could be counter productive and so I hope you will understand why we are taking the approach that we are.

On progress towards the Phase Two statutory consultation, we intend to run this early in 2018 and in the way we discussed when we met. Once we have completed the highways studies (on which we are closely engaged with Highways England and Northamptonshire County Council at the moment), we anticipate completing the body of technical work required (for both the main scheme site and the proposed works area at Junction 15A) and then progressing to consultation. We are targeting that this will take place in Q1 of 2018.

On the subject of access, a point which is often overlooked is that ease, quality and suitability of access is a paramount consideration for an SRFI. With efficiency of operation such a critical factor for the businesses that would occupy and use Rail Central, our focus is on ensuring we have high-quality and dependable access at all times. Were we to create traffic congestion, we would be harming our own ability to operate and serve our customers. For those reasons, we (like local residents who have raised concerns with us about the potential for traffic congestion) have a strong interest in ensuring we have a good, effective and successful highways design and highways mitigation plan.

We are not currently considering a Park & Ride scheme but, should there be support for this idea through Phase Two consultation, we would want to review it further with South Northamptonshire Council, Northamptonshire County Council and other stakeholders.

With regard to your concerns about the capacity of the West Coast Main Line (WCML), we are aware that similar concerns have been expressed by objectors and other stakeholders on most of the new SRFI schemes being brought forward, whether on the WCML or other radial routes out of London. The Department for Transport has in place a long-term national strategy to address such issues, involving a mixture of new and upgraded existing infrastructure to address growth in passenger and freight traffic. This is then being progressed through the Office of Road and Rail and, through its license conditions, Network Rail. This long-term strategy, as endorsed in the National Policy

Statement (NPS), encapsulates the quantum of growth expected from a greatly-expanded network of SRFI, with much of this traffic focused on the West Coast Main Line (WCML) corridor.

It is worth reiterating that our objective for Rail Central is to respond to the specific sections of the NPS and the Planning Act 2008, focused on the expansion of the currently small network of Strategic Rail Freight Interchanges.

To this end, we must demonstrate that the Rail Central site can achieve its initial phase of operations with at least 4 trains handled per day, with scope to expand this level of traffic in the longer term. I should also stress that the ability of the site and surrounding infrastructure to handle the anticipated levels of road and rail traffic is also of commercial importance to us and our occupiers, given the substantial investment which will be required to connect into the road and rail networks and provide the considerable scale of interchange facilities.

That said, we remain satisfied from our initial and ongoing discussions with Network Rail that sufficient capacity can be found to support the first phase, whether in shorter and faster express freight services or the more traditional intermodal and conventional wagon services, in line with the emerging requirements of users of the site as serviced by the train operators.

The work being undertaken on assessing the capacity of the WCML, across both “slow” and “fast” lines is still ongoing, as each route section is being reviewed sequentially by Network Rail and our respective technical teams, with the results then being collated and validated as a whole.

Given the scale and variety of traffic on the WCML, you may appreciate that such analysis takes time, and I would not want to prejudice the process by releasing interim results which have not been subject to the validation process. You may also appreciate that, with other SRFI being promoted on the WCML, the commercial sensitivities of releasing information prior to the DCO submission (and potential Examination) are significant.

To answer your point on the NLL capacity study, Network Rail has produced its report and provided it to us. That informs one part of the overall process of rail feasibility and capacity. As I say, however, because the overall feasibility assessment is informed by a number of inter-related and inter-dependent studies, it is appropriate to publish the results at the point when the assessment has been completed in full and not piecemeal – and that commercial sensitivities are also a factor. We are aware of the appetite locally to review individual reports upon completion but, as I say, that would not provide the full perspective.

Whilst we therefore remain confident that network capacity can be found to accommodate the immediate and longer-term requirements of the site and its occupiers, we remain committed to completing the work on assessing this capacity in a thorough and robust manner, working alongside Network Rail and Highways England.

On HGV movements, we are modelling to inform our scheme design and our design for mitigation. As you say, SRFI are expected to achieve 4 trains per day capacity at opening under the NSIP criteria. Our HGV movement modelling is for 3,343 arrivals and 3,343 departures per day. This is based on a proposed potential commercial floorspace of c.7.4 million sq ft. HGV modelling is linked to the sq ft metric. In terms of occupier operations and the proposed commercial operation of Rail Central, having access to fast freight and traditional freight terminals will be part of what makes Rail Central attractive to businesses. They would choose to locate at Rail Central in order to make use of the strategic inter-modal capability where it will improve their operations, increase efficiency, create



more sustainable supply chains and enhance competitiveness. All of the proposed units at Rail Central would be either directly rail connected, or rail served via the internal road links to the rail interchange facilities.

I hope that this letter is useful in responding to your questions and letting you know where we are in the process. I appreciate that you and your constituents have points which you would like to explore in detail. I will continue to address them as best we can at this time and I look forward to providing more detail when the assessments in question are finished and as we progress to Phase Two consultation and onwards into the potential Examination of the proposal.

We will continue to keep you updated and we will be in touch to confirm more details on the Phase Two consultation when those are fixed, if not before.

Yours sincerely

James Digby
Director, Ashfield Land