

Address

Dear

Oxford Phase 2 Investment

I am writing on behalf of Oxfordshire Growth Board of which I am currently Chair. The Growth Board is the joint committee of the six Oxfordshire councils with key strategic partners including both of Oxford's universities, the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Oxfordshire Skills Board, Homes England, the Environment Agency and the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group.

The investment in improved rail infrastructure in central Oxfordshire is a critical step in unlocking very significant economic growth in Oxford and Oxfordshire and significantly boosting both East-West and North-South connectivity. The Growth Board is writing to Ministers to highlight our support for the Phase 2 works at Oxford Station and rail corridor and the related Outline Business Case, which we understand is now with you for consideration. We wish to underline the importance of confirming this investment as a significant contribution to supporting post-COVID recovery of the economy in Oxfordshire and regionally.

Oxfordshire's rail system – which functions as a strategic corridor for local and national services – has accommodated significant growth in the last ten years but has little further capacity and does not sufficiently link important hubs within Oxfordshire and beyond. This scheme is vital, and an investment decision is required in 2020 to support sustainable economic growth and recovery across Oxfordshire, the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and beyond.

There are significant wider benefits articulated in the Network Rail business case that we would like to reiterate. Ultimately, Oxford Phase 2 is a critical next step in positioning Oxford as a national rail hub with huge county-wide and national connectivity benefits.

In providing for projected growth in both passenger and freight services, Oxford Phase 2 is central to the infrastructure needs of the county, Arc and the country. It is a key requisite step in enabling East West Rail by 2024, facilitating sustainable transport connections across the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, and in doing so, supporting a technology cluster of world-leading scale. This will in turn enable the many assets and labour markets and new homes right across the Arc to be harnessed more effectively to support numerous potential growth areas, contributing to the national exchequer, and wider levelling up agenda in less prosperous parts of the Arc and adjacent regions.

Increased track capacity will enable the movement of more freight services on the existing and new routes, which will take vehicles off the road. Moreover, futureproofing work to allow

for future electrification of lines through Oxford and beyond should sit at the heart of the decarbonisation agenda.

The West End Global Innovation District (GID), within which the station sits, is highlighted as a central project in Oxfordshire's Local Industrial Strategy. Together, the sites will account for 350,000m² development to be brought forward over 15 years creating 13,500 jobs and 1,500 units of housing. Oxford Phase 2 is a critical investment to support the connectivity and attractiveness of the GID, which will form another key part of the wider Oxfordshire innovation ecosystem.

Oxford Phase 2 is an investment opportunity that delivers tangible quick-wins, but also supports a pragmatic and incremental approach to wider transformational change. Local partners are currently working with the Department for Transport and Network Rail on the next phase of the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study. This is building a strong case for Oxford Phase 3 investment, now known as Oxfordshire Connect, which should support additional sustainable transport connections throughout the county and to the east, west, north and south of the UK, as well as the ports, and we hope in time, Heathrow. By reopening the Cowley Branch Line, Oxfordshire Connect (Phase 3) would also be crucial in delivering the National Infrastructure Commission's recommendation to support connected housing and economic development in Oxfordshire, connecting Oxford's large-scale urban extensions, science and business parks to the city centre and beyond. We are clear that none of this will be possible without the timely delivery of Oxford Phase 2.

Many businesses across Oxfordshire are also strongly supportive of this scheme that marks a critical step in unlocking much needed opportunities, particularly at a time when economic recovery is paramount. If we are to grasp the unrivalled economic growth opportunity presented to us across Oxfordshire, then increasing capacity, futureproofing growth and enhancing connectivity is an essential and urgent requirement.

We ask that you support this major strategic investment at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Emily Smith
Chair of Oxfordshire Growth Board

On behalf of:
Cherwell District Council
Oxford City Council
Oxfordshire County Council
South Oxfordshire District Council
Vale of White Horse District Council
West Oxfordshire District Council