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27 September 2021

The Rt. Hon Rishi Sunak
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

The Rt. Hon Grant Shapps
Secretary of State for Transport
Great Minster House
Horseferry Rd
London
SW1P 4DR

Dear Chancellor and Secretary of State

Oxfordshire Connect Rail Investment Programme

I am writing on behalf of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (formerly the Oxfordshire Growth Board) to underline the importance of the Oxfordshire Connect Rail Investment Programme and its component projects.

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership is a 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 Partnership's role is to coordinate local efforts to manage economic, housing and infrastructure development in a way that is inclusive and maximises local social and environmental benefits.

As the Growth Board, this partnership jointly funded the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study (ORCS), in close collaboration with the Department for Transport, Network Rail and other key strategic partners including the East West Rail Consortium.

The study was finalised, approved and published in summer 2021. The outcome was the Oxfordshire Connect Programme of rail enhancements, now being taken forward, which is critical to facilitating sustainable growth across Oxford and Oxfordshire and significantly boosting both East-West and North–South connectivity, including facilitating East West Rail. Oxfordshire's rail system functions as a strategic corridor for local and national services but has insufficient further capacity to meet the connectivity and capacity requirements set out in the ORCS and does not sufficiently link important

hubs within Oxfordshire and beyond – which is vital to supporting sustainable economic growth and recovery across Oxfordshire, the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and beyond.

The programme, which is summarised in the enclosed document, identifies the significant investment required, including our established strategic priorities: further investment in the rail corridor through Oxford, upgrading the eastern side of the station and re-opening Cowley Branch Line.

The Partnership is writing to Ministers to highlight our particular support for the completion of Phase 2 works at Oxford Station (west side platform, station and Botley Road Bridge), and approval of the Full Business Case, which we understand is due to be submitted to the Department this autumn. There are significant wider benefits set out in the Network Rail business case that we would emphasise. Ultimately, Phase 2 is a critical next step in positioning Oxford as a national rail hub with huge county-wide and national connectivity benefits, directly supporting the next stage of East West Rail, facilitating sustainable transport connections across the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

Increased track capacity will also enable the movement of more freight services on the existing and new routes, which will take vehicles off the road. Moreover, future proofing work to allow for future electrification of lines through Oxford and beyond should sit at the heart of the decarbonisation agenda.

In addition, the Partnership wishes to underline its support for:

- Cowley Plus – accelerated programme for Cowley branch line delivery in 2024 (to align with Oxford Phase 2 and the Connection Stage 1 of East West Rail, Oxford to Milton Keynes). crucial in delivering the National Infrastructure Commission’s recommendation to support connected housing and economic development in Oxfordshire, connecting Oxford’s approved large-scale urban extensions, science and business parks to the city centre and beyond
- Oxfordshire Connect Key Output 3 packages - additional east-side platform and track capacity south of Oxford, to align with East West Rail Connection Stages 2 and 3 (Oxford to Bedford and Cambridge)
- Linked to this, funding of these future stages of East West Rail to support transformed connectivity across the Arc
- Completion of Electrification between Didcot and Oxford, extending to Hanborough, tying in with the submitted business case proposals for the transformation of the North Cotswold Line and development of Hanborough as a strategic transport hub.
- Progression of the wider rail decarbonisation agenda, including electrification of East West Rail at the earliest opportunity

We are clear that none of these critical projects will be possible without the early progression and timely delivery of Oxford Phase 2.

In addition, Economic consultants - Volterra – have been examining the economic impact of developments across Oxford West End. Volterra highlighted the importance of the station as enabling infrastructure for development across the West End. In

particular they stated that “the development proposed within Oxford’s West End simply cannot sustainably come forward without the station redevelopment. Increasing rail capacity will provide workers with sustainable access to the area.”

Yours Sincerely,



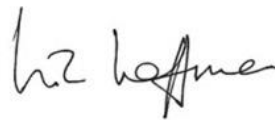
Councillor Michele Mead
Chair, Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Leader, West Oxfordshire District Council




Councillor Barry Wood
Leader, Cherwell District Council



Councillor Susan Brown
Leader, Oxford City Council



Councillor Liz Leffman
Leader, Oxfordshire County Council



Councillor Sue Cooper
Leader, South Oxfordshire District Council



Councillor Emily Smith
Leader, Vale of White Horse District Council