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PRESS RELEASE

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RAIL CAMPAIGN CALLS FOR QUICKER HEATHROW LINK

Local pro-rail campaigners are calling for a direct rail link between Heathrow and Reading with connections to the Thames Valley and the west to be built to tie in with the expansion of Reading station and electrification of the Great Western Main Line (GWML).

“More people travel to or from Heathrow from the west and south-west than from any other direction except London” said Richard Stow of campaign group Railfuture’s Thames Valley Branch. “A Heathrow – Reading rail link could be opened within five years at a cost of just £500 million. The HS2 spur to Heathrow is 20 years away and will cost several billion.”

In September there were news reports that the then Transport Secretary, Philip Hammond, has initiated a study into linking the proposed HS2 high speed line, the GWML and the planned Crossrail route at Heathrow. In October he was reported to have proposed a high-speed rail line between Heathrow and Gatwick as well.

The Transport Select Committee complained in its report on HS2 that these proposals came out “through a series of nods and winks in the press” and that this is “unacceptable”. It wants a Government statement on possible new rail links to Heathrow, including a direct Heathrow – Reading link. The Select Committee says:

“We... recommend that the Government makes a clear statement about the status of possible complimentary schemes [i.e. complimentary to HS2] such as those which would link Heathrow to GWML to the west or to Gatwick.”

A direct rail link could halve Reading – Heathrow journey times, currently 38 minutes by RailAir coach. It would connect with First Great Western trains for the west and South Wales and with CrossCountry trains for Basingstoke, the south coast, the West Midlands and north. “The expansion of Reading station, followed by Great Western electrification and Crossrail, makes this the ideal time to add a rail link from the airport to Reading, the Thames Valley and beyond. This is an opportunity not to be missed.” added Richard.

It would need a new westward rail junction at West Drayton, where there is already an eastward junction for Heathrow – Paddington trains. The DfT claims the link could cost £500 million. However, this is far less than the billions needed for HS2’s proposed spur to Heathrow.

The Thames Valley Branch of Railfuture, the independent national rail campaign, has long called for a Heathrow rail link to Reading for connections to the west and CrossCountry. Branch Chairman Richard Stow welcomed the Select Committee's call for a DfT statement and added:

“A Heathrow – Reading rail link would take more cars off the road than the HS2 Heathrow spur and could open 15 years sooner – reducing congestion, journey times and climate change.”

Notes for editors:

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Rail is a vital part of an integrated efficient transport system serving a modern, vibrant, environmentally sustainable economy. We are pro-rail but not anti-road. Railfuture maintains that investment in rail travel and rail freight is vital to the future of the UK economy and environment.

For more information please contact:

Bruce Williamson, media spokesman
Tel: 0117 927 2954 Mobile: 07759 557389
media@railfuture.org.uk

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