

12 February 2013

Valentina Licata

Office of Rail Regulation

One Kemble Street

London

WC2B 4AN

Dear Ms Licata,

**Opportunity to comment on Network Rail's strategic business plan for control period 5**

I note from the notice on the Office of Rail Regulation website that you are inviting comments and views on Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan (SBP). I am pleased to respond on behalf of Bristol Airport Limited.

Bristol Airport is supportive of the work being undertaken by Network Rail to improve and modernise the Great Western Main Line and I am pleased to see that this has been given prominence in the document titled 'A better railway for a better Britain', published as part of the SBP suite of documents. This will serve to improve surface access to Bristol Airport and reduce reliance on the car by our passengers and staff for journeys to and from the airport.

However, in our response to the Department for Transport's consultation on their Draft Aviation Policy Framework we expressed serious concern about the proposals for a new rail line from the Great Western Mainline near Slough to Heathrow. We believe that that the potential benefits for the South West of England and Wales from this scheme have been overstated. Furthermore, we believe it has the potential to frustrate route development at Bristol Airport and increase the leakage of passengers from the South West to airports outside the region, which generates additional emissions.

Whilst we appreciate that the SBP may not be the appropriate place to consider these concerns, we think it is important that Network Rail give proper consideration to the business case, benefits and impacts of the scheme as they develop their proposals. Indeed, we note that the Government's wish to see a new railway link giving western rail access to Heathrow Airport as set out in the High Level Output Specification is subject to a satisfactory business case and the agreement of acceptable terms with the Heathrow aviation industry. However, the definition of the Western Access scheme and the GRIP process for its delivery as described in the SBP seem to be geared to the preparation of an engineering solution to a perceived problem, and there is no mention of a process to assess the business case or for securing agreement with the Heathrow aviation industry with respect to its funding. It is vital that these matters are properly addressed before decisions are taken to proceed with such a complex and difficult project and that appropriate time is allowed in the project programme for the processes involved. It is particularly important that these issues are considered early on in the project development to avoid abortive costs and inefficient use of public funding, given the pressures on Network Rail's funds in Control Period 5.

I should be grateful if you could take account of our concerns during your assessment of the SBP to ensure that Network Rail's plans provide the best possible value in respect of the scheme to provide western rail access to Heathrow Airport.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Davies  
Planning & Environment Director  
Bristol Airport  
Bristol, BS48 3DY  
[www.bristolairport.co.uk](http://www.bristolairport.co.uk)

