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Rt Hon Philip Hammond Esq MP
Secretary of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
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Dear Minister

HIGH SPEED RAIL: INVESTING IN BRITAIN'S FUTURE

I am writing to enclose a copy of Network Rail's response to the current consultation on High Speed Rail. We will be providing a copy to the Consultation team direct but I wanted to provide a copy to you as well.

We believe High Speed Rail is vital for Britain, for its economy and for its transport network. In 2008/09, we undertook a vast amount of analysis to understand the long term capacity issues facing the railway as part of our *New Lines Study*. The conclusions we drew from this were clear.

Firstly, that all of our major intercity routes will face huge challenges in terms of having sufficient capacity for future decades. As you know, more and more passengers are choosing to travel by rail and more and more companies choosing to move their goods by rail. Every piece of analysis we have done has led us to conclude that demand is going to continue to grow strongly in the decades to come. The challenges this brings in terms of those major intercity routes are substantial and complex and, of these routes, the challenges are at their most acute – and present themselves soonest – on the West Coast Main Line.

We believe it is untenable to do nothing to address the looming capacity problems on the West Coast Main Line, a key part of our

national infrastructure linking our capital to the West Midlands (our second largest conurbation) and Greater Manchester (our third largest). The analysis we undertook for the *New Lines Study* suggested that, by the end of this decade, there will be no more action that can be taken to increase capacity on the route.

At first, the problems this presents will manifest themselves in communities such as Milton Keynes or Northampton where people wishing to travel to London or Birmingham will simply not be able to get on a train at all at certain times of the day. Further ahead, and similar problems will begin to form on the major intercity routes such as from London to Birmingham or from London to Manchester. By this point, the restricted capacity of our rail network between our major cities will have become a significant brake on, and barrier to, sustainable national economic growth.

This led us to our second key conclusion which was that the most cost effective, least disruptive, and therefore most suitable intervention, was the construction of a new line, broadly along the London-West Midlands-Manchester alignment. This, we believe, is the only option that delivers the network capacity that will be needed in future decades. I should note that we also undertook analysis that showed that the East Midlands and Leeds would be the next corridor where those capacity pressures began to manifest themselves most acutely and therefore support the proposed 'Y' network.

Our third key conclusion was that, if a new line is the most appropriate answer to the capacity question, this line should be high speed. Put in pure economic terms, the faster the journey, the better the business case.

On the back of our analysis, we have supported High Speed 2 (HS2) since it was announced and remain absolutely willing to assist the department and HS2 Ltd to develop and deliver this Project in whatever way is most suitable. As you know, we have already been collaborating with your officials and colleagues from HS2 Ltd on the Project Board to work through some of the interfaces that HS2 will have with the existing infrastructure.

In addition, HS2 would mean a huge amount of capacity on the existing infrastructure (the thirteen paths an hour on the West Coast Main Line currently used by long-distance services) would be freed up. This would be potentially transformational for the very communities – such as Milton Keynes or Northampton – that would suffer most if no action

was taken and potentially transformational for freight. As a result, we have been working with Passenger Focus to talk to passengers and other local Stakeholders about how best to make use of this capacity.

It is clear the scheme has many opponents. We fully understand that a Project on this scale is likely to raise objections and emotions. However, we remain firmly of the view that the step change increase in rail capacity that HS2 would provide is essential for the long term economic wellbeing of the nation as a whole. None of the alternatives proposed are in any way sufficient to address the capacity challenge and would instead merely delay the inevitable at great cost to the taxpayer and huge inconvenience to the people and companies who rely on the West Coast Main Line.

We do recognise that there will be challenges in delivering this Project but remain entirely committed to working through those challenges sensibly and constructively with your officials and HS2 Ltd. Equally, we are committed to planning the whole network in such a way that we can help you maximise the benefits of HS2 for those who use the railway, for the economy and the nation as a whole.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Higgins".

David Higgins
Chief Executive

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