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Jim O'Sullivan
Chief Executive, Highways England

By email

Dear Jim,

M23 Northern Section: the London-Gatwick Road Corridor

I was very pleased to see the publication last week of the Highways England (HE) Route Strategies, as a basis for your consultation on developing schemes for inclusion in the Road Investment Strategy 2.

I am writing as part of that consultation to seek a closer dialogue with HE and the Department for Transport (DfT) on the specific issues around the road corridor between Croydon and Gatwick/Crawley. This forms part of the M25/M23 network identified in your consultation document. But I am also keen to engage HE on wider work that is being done by Coast to Capital LEP and our partners to properly understand strategic issues that are possibly outside the scope of your consultation document.

Summary

Coast to Capital is the Local Enterprise Partnership for the whole M23 corridor, and our area includes the coastal area of West Sussex, Brighton and Hove and Lewes, as well as East Surrey and Croydon. Ours is not a city region, but achieves a high level of economic performance, particularly driven by activity in Brighton, in Gatwick and the surrounding towns, and in Croydon.

In preparing our response to the Government's recent consultation on the Industrial Strategy, we have become increasingly aware of the critical role of the London-Gatwick road corridor in sustaining our economic growth. We have come to the conclusion that this part of the network has not had the focus and salience that it deserves in national

investment decision making up to now. This may be because of the complexity and varied ownership of the roads, and the very diverse political geography of the area.

The London-Gatwick road corridor comprises the northern section of the M23, associated sections and junctions of the M25, crucial sections of the A23 in both Surrey and Croydon, and roads feeding onto/parallel to these including the A25, particularly as the A23 and the A25 form part of the M25 and M23 Tactical Diversion Routes.

We would like a more detailed engagement with HE to help us understand the issues that affect our road network and in particular the links between SRN and non-SRN roads which have disproportionate economic importance. This will allow us to represent the interests of our region properly in the RIS2 process.

Strategic issues

The London-Gatwick road corridor plays a number of significant functions in relation to the economy of our region:

- The M23/A23 provides the connecting road between Gatwick airport, the second largest airport in the UK, and London. While the airport is significantly dependent upon rail links for its passenger growth, it does continue to generate road traffic from passengers, the 30,000 staff working on the airport campus and in terms of freight and logistics
- The Gatwick Diamond, comprising towns around the airport including Crawley, Horley, Redhill, Reigate, Horsham, Burgess Hill and others, also supports a thriving economy with a £24 billion GVA contribution. This economic activity generates significant road demand, particularly linking workers from across the wider south east to jobs around the airport.
- Croydon is the fastest growing borough in London, and its economy is increasingly linked into that of the Gatwick Diamond and the wider south east. Close access to the M25 drives significant travel from the Borough and other parts of south London to destinations across the South East.
- The London-Gatwick corridor also includes three significant points of interaction between our regional road network and the M25. As well as the main Junction 7, there is also significant traffic using J8 (Reigate) and J6 (Godstone) to travel down towards the Gatwick Diamond.

The strategic importance of this road network to our region and the wider south-east and national economy is, however, often overlooked because it does not fit neatly within the political geography of the region. Unlike city-region economies we have no single planning authority, no single transport authority, and no natural link to HE and motorway network to address the strategic importance of roads to our regional economy.

Key roads in the London-Gatwick corridor are run by HE, Surrey County Council, Croydon Council and Transport for London (TfL). We are dealing with the consequences of the decision taken in the 1980s not to extend the M23 into London, and as our regional economy has grown many of the specific issues overlooked then

are now presenting significant challenges in terms of congestion, journey time, safety, air pollution and resilience.

Our ask

Coast to Capital and our partners would like to work further with HE to develop a more detailed business case on the potential options around investing in this critical road corridor, as part of your Route Strategy consultation. The goal of this would be to build a comprehensive understanding on the demands that will be placed on this road network over the next 20 years, in order to support the growth of our regional economy.

A recently completed rail study commissioned by the DfT on the Brighton main line between the coast and London anticipated growth on the corridor will double over the next 40 years. Investment in the rail network particularly focused on Croydon to remove an identified bottleneck would reduce pressures on strategic road network particular on the A23/M23 corridor. We want to work with HE and the DfT on how this essential investment can be delivered.

We have prepared a brief overview of the main strategic issues in our region, and would identify six key issues which we think should be worthy of further study. Because of the lack of strategic focus on this section of the road network over the last 20 years, some of these issues are still very localised. Detailed work is currently underway on some of them. But we believe that, taken together, it would be sensible to develop a single work programme to support the development of this transport corridor and of our regional economy. We would like to engage the expertise and resources of HE in order to gain a proper understanding of the issues around this critical road corridor.

Our six key challenges are:

1: Economic growth and changing land use patterns in the Gatwick Diamond

The sub-region around Gatwick airport is one of the engines of our economy. It is home to 800 international businesses and is a major employment destination within the South East. The region has grown significantly in recent years, and local plans in West Sussex and East Surrey anticipate further growth in housing and business space in coming years. Our ask is to work with HE to properly forecast demand on M23 J10 and J9 which serve the Gatwick Diamond, as well as to understand future demands on the M23 particularly anticipating the goals of Local Plans and the possible construction of new housing settlements as part of this.

Issue 2: Capacity on M25 Junctions 6, 7 and 8

We welcome the Route Study's focus on the demands on these key junctions of the M25, which link the national route network into our regional economy. Each of these junctions is already highly congested. We would like to work further with HE to properly reflect the importance of this infrastructure to towns such as Reigate, Redhill, Oxted and Caterham in order to support the sustainable growth of our region.

Issue 3: Surrey strategic road network

Surrey County Council is planning a strategic analysis on the demands on its road network around the M23 Northern Corridor. This will include analysis of the investment needed to support the development of the A23, as well as wider development in the County. We would like to work more closely with HE in order to ensure that this work is properly coordinated within the wider issues contained within the Route Strategy.

Issue 4: Hooley

The village of Hooley carries a disproportionate impact from the narrowing of the M23 from three lanes to one lane at its northern end. This is exacerbated by the lack of direct access from Redhill and Reigate onto and off of the M25, which leads many vehicles to use Hooley as a turning point to join the motorway. The growth in our regional economy is generating clear safety, congestion, noise and air pollution issues in the village which need to be addressed

Issues 5: Star Lane junction and rat running

Congestion at Hooley and at M25 junctions 6, 7 and 8 is leading to significant rat running from across Croydon and north Surrey, where motorists use country lanes that run parallel to the motorway as an alternative to joining the M25. While this road network is the responsibility of local authorities, many of the issues that it suffers are generated directly by the operation decisions of the M25. We would urge close cooperation with HE to help understand these and to develop practical solutions to this disproportionate weight of traffic particularly at rush hour.

Issue 6: A23 link to Coulsdon

Running for about three kilometres north from Hooley, motorway traffic uses a single- and dual-lane local road for around four kilometres before accessing the Coulsdon bypass in order to go into Croydon. Along this stretch of road HE responsibility passes to Transport for London. As at Hooley, this road is not fit for purpose, with pedestrian-controlled crossings and on-street parking affecting high-volume traffic coming off of a motorway. Pressure on this stretch of the road is increasing with a number of high-volume local housing developments in the Coulsdon area in recent years. Again, we

would like to bring HE into discussion with TfL and other authorities to identify a sustainable solution to this problem.

Going forward

Coast to Capital and our partners in the region would like to begin a strategic dialogue with HE in order to build a shared understanding of these issues and to maximise the influence that we can have on your Route Strategy consultation. We would particularly like to explore the availability of funding from HE to help deepen our analysis of these issues and to identify a proportionate solution to the problems that we face.

I look forward to hearing from you.

I am copying this letter to colleagues in Surrey and Croydon Councils, to other transport authorities in the region and to John Hayes MP in the DfT.

yours sincerely
Jonathan Sharrock

Jonathan Sharrock
Chief Executive

