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**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Rt Hon Lord Andrew Adonis
The Secretary of State For Transport
c/o Transport and Works Act Orders Unit
Department for Transport
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Dear Lord Adonis

The Transport and Works Act 1992 – Proposed Heathrow Airtrack Order

The following is the Council's response to the Transport and Works Act submission by Heathrow Airtrack.

The Council remains in support of the scheme but has concerns about the impact on road traffic brought about by additional closures of level crossings, and expect that the Airtrack scheme would fund any measures required to mitigate the effects. We are also concerned about the environmental impacts of additional services on the line. With regard to service operation we note and welcome the inclusion of calls at Wokingham, and seek also for trains to stop at Winnersh Triangle.

The Council has no observations on the construction and operation of the new section of line between Staines and Heathrow Terminal 5.

1. Proposed Overall Service

- 1.1 The Council supports the overall objectives of Airtrack in providing much faster, direct and reliable access to Heathrow from the Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell area, greatly reducing journey times from the Wokingham area in particular and potentially reducing congestion on the road network.
- 1.2 Airtrack will also enable businesses and residents of Wokingham Borough to benefit from better, faster and more direct access to Heathrow airport.
- 1.3 Airtrack will improve frequencies for local passengers between Bracknell, Wokingham and Reading and thus offer a more attractive alternative to the car than the present service, particularly from Bracknell which has half-hourly trains at present.

2. Services

- 2.1 We welcome the inclusion of calls at Wokingham (and Bracknell) on the service between Reading and Heathrow.
- 2.2 The Council also requests the inclusion of calls at Winnersh Triangle, to serve the large business park currently under redevelopment, and provide a good interchange with the road network.



- 2.2.1 Winnersh Triangle Business Park, when redevelopment is completed, will comprise 191,000 sq m of office, research and development, and light industrial units (potentially including a 15,000 sq m hotel and retail). Several units will be adjacent to the station and all will be within ten minutes' walk. Airtrack would enable direct access to Heathrow in 40 minutes, to the benefit of businesses and visitors, and improve local train frequencies for workers.
- 2.2.2 The station is close to the A329(M) and less than 3km from its junction with the M4, enabling good interchange with the trunk road network and reducing the need to reach Heathrow by road.
- 2.2.3 The station is also conveniently sited for access via the local road network through Earley and Woodley, including the business parks off the A4 in north Earley, which are within ten minutes' drive.

3. Changes on the Existing Rail Network (including level crossings)

3.1 General

- 3.1.1 The Council has considerable concerns about the impact that implementing the new services will have on traffic flows on roads approaching level crossings in the Borough. The Council is also concerned that the air quality issues of additional queuing traffic at level crossings has not been taken into account in the environmental impact assessment. It is imperative that this matter is addressed and assessed as part of the overall scheme impact.
- 3.1.2 With regard to the effects at the level crossings, the Council questions the accuracy of the data presented within volume 2 of the Environmental Statement, particularly the crossing downtimes, pre and post Airtrack on Easthampstead Road compared with Waterloo Road.

Objection

- 3.1.3 To date Airtrack have done no work to model this impact and so the overall effect cannot be stated. Due to the lack of information available the Council objects to the proposals on the basis that the impact could be detrimental to overall traffic flow on the Barkham Road, Easthampstead Road and Waterloo Road. However traffic modelling work is being undertaken in relation to these links and should the effects prove not to have anything more than a minor impact on the overall network's performance then this objection will be withdrawn. To this end the Council is expecting Airtrack to fully fund the modelling work and should it fail to do so the objection will stand.

3.2 Barkham Road

- 3.2.1 The crossing is on the B3349 from Wokingham via Barkham to Arborfield, where it joins the A327. Immediately north of the crossing (15 metres) it forms a junction with the main A321 at a mini-roundabout, and thus has an impact on that road. Indeed, vehicles over 3.8m high using the A321 have to divert via the crossing to avoid the two low bridges where the Waterloo and North Downs lines cross Finchampstead Road. The A321 is an important through route from Hampshire and the Blackwater Valley to the M4, Reading, Henley and beyond. The section of B3349 Barkham Road immediately south-west of the crossing is narrow and liable to congestion, notably when the gates open and vehicles released south-westbound try to manoeuvre past those still queuing in the opposite direction.
- 3.2.2 Queuing at the Barkham Road crossing also has considerable impact on town centre traffic and access to the station and station car park.

- 3.2.3 During most times of day there are four trains an hour each way, two each on South West Trains' Reading to Waterloo service, and two on First Great Western's Reading to Redhill and Gatwick Airport (North Downs line) service. The impact of these on the crossing is mitigated because trains in each direction on both services are timed to cross at Wokingham, whether by accident or design. Thus, when trains are running close to time there are four closures per hour for much of the day. There are a few additional peak hour trains which contribute to the impact. There are also a small number of Cross Country and other non-stop trains, mainly during off-peak hours, though their effect on road traffic is relatively minimal.
- 3.2.4 Council officers have met with representatives of the Consortium who have provided some details regarding crossing down times following the implementation of the new services. It appears that the additional services will cause significant additional delay at this point in the highway network and as such will impact on proposals for enhancement of Wokingham town centre.
- 3.2.5 The Council has submitted a major scheme business case to SEERA for improvements to Wokingham station and are engaged with Network Rail and South West Trains in proposals for station enhancements within Network Rail's station improvement programme. The objective underlying these is for improved modal interchange and try to relieve congestion at Wokingham station. Delay arising from additional level crossing down time will affect bus reliability and reduce the opportunity for modal interchange at this transport hub.
- 3.2.6 The impact will be alleviated to some extent if Airtrack trains are timed to cross at Wokingham, reducing the number of additional closures per hour to two.
- 3.2.7 Traffic levels on the A321 are likely to increase significantly in the future as two Strategic Development Locations are planned for Wokingham, one for 2,500 homes immediately south of the Waterloo line, and one for 1,500 between the town and the A329(M). A third, for 3,500 homes on a brown-field site at Arborfield Garrison, will inevitably increase traffic along the B3349 across the level crossing. Wokingham will be the nearest station for all three SDLs and many new residents will be seeking to travel to the station, to continue by train.
- 3.2.8 Should traffic modelling demonstrate a reduction in service for road users due to the Airtrack service implementation then the Council will be seeking funds for measures to mitigate the impact. In particular the Council would be seeking an alternative rail crossing or changes to existing rail over bridges on the Finchampstead Road to facilitate HGV usage on this route.

3.3 Star Lane (Easthampstead Road)

- 3.3.1 This crossing is on a busy unclassified road between Wokingham and Crowthorne. Although there are available alternative main road routes, this is the most direct and as such it is well used in peak hours.
- 3.3.2 The Council's core strategy proposes a Strategic Development Location in the area immediately south of the Waterloo line and alongside the Easthampstead Road. The SDL would have potential for an additional 2,500 houses. The proposed road network has yet to be finalised but traffic levels using the crossing, which is likely to form the most direct route into Wokingham for many of the new residents, are likely to increase substantially.
- 3.3.3 Should traffic modelling demonstrate a reduction in service for road users due to the Airtrack service implementation then the Council will be seeking funds or measures to mitigate the impact. Options in this location may include a new rail crossing associated with development of the housing site either at an existing crossing location as part of a new southern spine road. In addition the Council would be seeking support for changes to rail over bridges on the Finchampstead Road to facilitate this route's use by HGV traffic.

3.4 Waterloo Road

- 3.4.1 Currently this is a less well used road between Wokingham and Bracknell, with access to Crowthorne. However new developments, including the above South Wokingham SDL and those currently under way in Bracknell Forest Borough to the south of the line, are likely to increase traffic. The crossing is also operating as an automatic half barrier at the moment. This type of barrier gives the most efficient mode of operation and so reduces down time. Additional road and rail traffic at this crossing would likely lead to the barrier being changed to a manually controlled crossing (as Easthampstead Road) and this in turn would lead to additional delays. This issue has been overlooked by the Airtrack assessment and needs to be addressed.
- 3.4.2 Should traffic modelling demonstrate a reduction in service for road users due to the Airtrack service implementation then the Council will be seeking funds or measures to mitigate the impact. Options in this location may include a new rail crossing associated with development of the housing site either at an existing crossing location as part of a new southern spine road. In addition the Council would be seeking support for changes to rail over bridges on the Finchampstead Road to facilitate this route's use by HGV traffic.

4 Environmental Impact

- 4.1 The Council objects to the proposals in relation to the additional services that will be regularly running on the Waterloo line and the impact this will have on residents living alongside the line. Airtrack have no proposals for noise mitigation in the Wokingham area. The Council would like to see this issue addressed before the proposals are taken forward.

5. Proposed Depot Locations

- 5.1 The Council fully supports the outcome of the assessment of alternative depot locations. It concurs with the outcome that states that the option of a depot south of Wokingham is wholly inappropriate and should be dismissed as an option. As a location of a depot the site would pose significant operational problems. The site has also been allocated through the Council's core strategy for housing development. The Council would strongly object to this proposal being taken any further.

Thank you for consulting the Council and providing the opportunity to comment. The Council looks forward to continuing to work with Airtrack towards the successful introduction of services. Should you need any clarification or further information please contact me on the details at the top of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Mark Moon
General Manager – Place and Neighbourhood Services