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Rt Hon Michael Gove
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

16 May 2016

Dear Michael

Camberley Rail Services – an opportunity to support growth through the new SWT Franchise

I am writing to ask for your help in promoting the need for improved rail services in the Camberley area - a local issue that I know you very much support.

Working together, the County Council and Borough Council have been looking at ways to improve the paucity of rail provision in the Camberley area. Our poor rail service is stifling our ability to deliver growth, which is something we believe the new franchise can help us with. The Invitation to Tender (ITT) for the replacement of the existing South West Trains Franchise will be issued shortly. Our two councils felt it timely to write to the Department for Transport highlighting the opportunity the new franchise presents to the Camberley area. I attach a copy of our joint letter for your reference. The Leader of Surrey Heath Borough Council and I in my role as Cabinet Member (and as a local Surrey Heath County Councillor) would very much welcome your support in promoting this issue within government, specifically in respect to the imminent publication of the ITT.

Our two authorities are ready to work with the wider rail industry, Local Economic Partnership and government to deliver our vision for Camberley that will see the redevelopment of Camberley station and critically an improve train services. We have conveyed our aspirations to the two shortlisted companies bidding for the franchise. However, the ITT is vital in setting out what is possible in the new franchise, hence this request for your assistance.

I hope that we can rely on your continued support to push hard in government for better rail services in the Camberley area.

Yours Sincerely

Karen Whelan
Chief Executive

Cllr Moira Gibson
Leader of the Council

Mike Goodman
Surrey County Council Cllr
and Cabinet Member for
Environment and Planning



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Franchise Team
Department for Transport
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Dear Sir

Camberley Rail Services – an opportunity to support growth through the new SWT Franchise

As the Invitation to Tender (ITT) for the replacement of the existing South West Trains Franchise will be issued shortly, our two councils felt it timely to write to you highlighting the opportunity the new franchise presents to Surrey Heath and, in particular, to the Camberley area.

Working collaboratively, Surrey County Council and Surrey Heath Borough Council have in place a strategy that aims to deliver growth of the right type in the right place. However, one major constraint on delivery of our ambition is the paucity of rail provision in the Camberley area. This is stifling our ability to deliver growth, which is something we believe the new franchise can help with.

As I am sure you are aware the Enterprise M3 Local Economic Partnership (EM3 LEP) recognises Camberley as a Step-Up town in their Strategic Economic Plan 2014-2020. In identifying Camberley as a Step-Up town the LEP recognised the vision for Camberley Town Centre. The LEP also recognised the need for station improvements at Camberley as well as improved or additional services on the Ascot to Guildford line which serves Camberley, Frimley and Bagshot. Surrey County Council and Surrey Heath Borough Council have been successful receiving funding in the region of £10 million from the previous local growth fund bidding round for infrastructure in the Camberley area.

The Borough Council is already actively acquiring land that will facilitate the delivery of planned and comprehensive growth which will improve the business case for rail provision. In addition, we are part of a 'One Public Estate' bid along working with the Cabinet Office and Local Government Association to release large areas of land for development within Camberley. Surrey Heath is stepping up to the ask of Central Government around the growth agenda, including the Garden Village concept. This collaborative approach aims to remove blockages to development and critically it will enable growth within the Camberley area.

The Surrey Rail Strategy highlighted the adequacy issues of access to London from Camberley, Bagshot and Frimley, with a poor level of service and relatively long journey times from these stations. The Wessex Route Study recognised the need to improve connectivity and proposes the introduction of additional services between Bagshot, Camberley and Frimley to London Waterloo (via Ascot) of 2-trains per hour (off peak). Increased platform capacity at London Waterloo will allow this increase in through services. There are already plans to extend platforms to take account of 10-car trains.

The economic benefits of improved connectivity to Camberley, Bagshot and Frimley and upgrading the Reading-Waterloo corridor are recognised in the Influencing Strategic Transport in the South East Report commissioned by four EM3, Coast 2 Capital, Solent and Thames Valley Berkshire LEPs.

Our own assessment work has shown that an infrastructure solution is not feasible in the short or medium term. We have looked at a number of options to improve rail infrastructure but concluded that there is no viable infrastructure solution that provides a direct connection onto the SWML from Camberley, without significant levels of development in the area to improve the business case.

As a result our councils believe that the franchise should make provision for direct through service at peak times as well as off peak along with frequency improvements. It is apparent from planned growth that there will be increased pressure on the Reading to Waterloo line from the residential development taking place along the line between Reading and Ascot. This does not take into account any employment/retail growth in the area but that will also be a factor in increasing demand on the service between Reading and Waterloo. Thus, the provision of more through trains from Guildford to Waterloo via Frimley, Camberley and Bagshot offers a realistic opportunity to provide an alternative/ additional service at Ascot for passengers which could free up capacity of the Reading – Waterloo train for the remainder of its journey. The through train from Guildford could also provide a stopping service at Longcross (serving the DERA development). It could allow for quicker through trains from Reading.

Moreover, a high level review of the current service operation at Ascot undertaken as part of our Camberley Rail Assessment suggests that there is some additional capacity at Ascot station. The new franchisee should be required to consider this option as a way of improving capacity on an already congested service from 2017.

We also support short term actions to explore and deliver reduced journey times between Camberley and London via Ash Vale following revised timetabling for trains between Alton and Guildford. In the medium term there might also be opportunities to improve connections at Ash Vale following the provision of the Woking Flyover.

We are ready to work with the wider rail industry to deliver our vision for Camberley. Our councils want to work with Network Rail and the train operating company to secure the redevelopment of Camberley station. Our aim is to create an attractive and welcoming station environment, with appropriate facilities along with new retail and residential provision.

We trust this conveys our ambition and our readiness to work with stakeholders, including those in the rail industry, to deliver it.

We have conveyed our collective aspirations in separate meetings with the two shortlisted companies bidding for the franchise. However, the ITT is vital in setting out what is possible in the new franchise and we ask that our ambitions and aspiration be recognised as set out above.

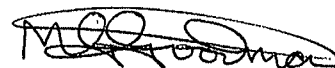
Yours faithfully



Karen Whelan
Chief Executive



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