Written evidence submitted by John Walton (HEN0001)

Topic of Focus: Surface Access, Regional Connectivity, and Maximising Wider Public Benefit

Executive Summary

The draft HENPS correctly identifies that Heathrow's expansion is contingent on passing strict environmental tests, notably ensuring **no net increase in airport-related road traffic**. However, the current framework treats airport surface access as an isolated issue. By explicitly **mandating a Southern Rail Link via Virginia Water** using a flexible path-swap model, the government can achieve its environmental targets while unlocking massive socio-economic benefits for the wider South West. Improving regional transit for non-aviation users is critical to making the entire Heathrow expansion scheme politically and socially palatable. [1, 2]

1. Structural Feasibility: Available Capacity & Pathing Optimization

The primary argument historically used to delay Southern Access to Heathrow (SAtH) is the concern over wider rail network disruption. This concern is structurally solved if the framework evaluates specific, under-utilized corridors:

- **The Wokingham-Reading Capacity:** The two-track line from Virginia Water through Bracknell and Wokingham to Reading currently handles a low-density, half-hourly service. It possesses clear pathing capacity to absorb new airport services without requiring massive, disruptive track duplication.
- **Bypassing the Egham Crossing Bottleneck:** By utilizing the proposed Heathrow Southern Railway tunnel design, trains can diverge at Virginia Water and bypass the congested Egham level crossings entirely. This eliminates the historical local traffic barriers associated with older proposals. [1, 2, 3]

2. The Service Integration & Path-Swap Model

The physical paths exist to execute a highly efficient service loop, regardless of final operator branding:

- **The Paddington-Wokingham Express Link:** Existing premium or fast paths heading out of Paddington/Old Oak Common to Heathrow can be extended seamlessly over the southern railway infrastructure to Wokingham. This links commuters directly to West London without adding trains to the congested Heathrow terminal platforms. [1]
- **The Waterloo Path-Swap:** Current slow services operating between Waterloo and Reading (via Staines and Wokingham) consume highly valuable paths on

the South Western main line. By diverting or terminating those regional western services into the new Heathrow southern tunnel, those freed-up eastern paths can be reallocated to run a high-frequency, direct Waterloo-to-Heathrow express service.[1]

3. Data-Driven Commuter Travel Time Improvements

The slow nature of the current South Western Railway (SWR) line out of Wokingham provides a stark contrast to what an integrated Heathrow Southern Link achieves:

- **Wokingham to Heathrow T5:** Drops from an unpredictable road journey via the M4/M25 to a reliable **20–25 minute rail journey**.
- **Wokingham to London (Paddington / Old Oak Common HS2 Interchange):** Drops from the current 71–80 minute Waterloo crawl down to approximately **42–45 minutes**. This cuts transit times by over half an hour, directly fulfilling Wokingham Borough Council's core strategic aim of improving rail connectivity to London. [1]

4. Securing Social Palatability through Wider Public Benefit

For the Heathrow expansion scheme to be palatable to the millions of residents living under its flight paths or near its corridors, the infrastructure must deliver tangible benefits to everyday citizens, not just wealthy flyers or aviation corporations.

- **A Transformation for Non-Heathrow Users:** The path-swap model turns Heathrow into a major multi-modal transit hub rather than just an airport. A commuter from Wokingham travelling to a job in West London, or a student heading to university, benefits from an entirely new, high-speed rail corridor that completely bypasses the congested central London tube network.
- **The Old Oak Common "Pressure Valve" and Euston Mitigation:** By creating a direct orbital path from the South West through Heathrow straight into the new HS2 hub at Old Oak Common, this network keeps thousands of regional commuters off over-burdened central London lines. Crucially, by providing a high-speed Western interchange for the South West, thousands of passengers heading north will no longer need to traverse central London via the Underground to access the network at London Euston. This structural shift acts as a pressure valve, reducing the overall peak passenger capacity required at the constrained Euston HS2 terminal site and maximizing the capital investment already made at Old Oak Common.
- **Unlocking the "Modal Shift":** Berkshire and Surrey feature a high concentration of premium business travellers and, crucially, airport workers who currently default to cars or taxis to access Heathrow due to poor orbital

rail options. Providing a predictable, 20-minute direct rail alternative is the single most effective tool available to trigger a permanent "modal shift" away from the tarmac. By capturing daily staff journeys alongside passenger traffic, this infrastructure directly protects the local road network and ensures Heathrow does not breach its legally binding statutory air quality and traffic targets.

5. Recommendation to the Committee

The Transport Committee should recommend that the **final HENPS be amended to explicitly mandate the delivery of a Southern Rail Access link** as a statutory condition for the Third Runway's Development Consent Order (DCO). The evidence proves that the pathing options are operationally viable, structurally efficient, and mathematically necessary to hit environmental targets while delivering the regional equity required to make the expansion socially acceptable. [1]

July 2026