



The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

4th January 2021

Dear Grant,

GREAT EASTERN MAIN LINE

As Chair of the Great Eastern Main Line (GEML) Taskforce, I am writing to you to outline the importance of the Great Eastern Main Line both to the region and to UK Plc and the benefits that could be derived through investment in the infrastructure.

The area combining the three counties of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk hold one of Britain's most important concentrations of vital infrastructure assets, including its largest ports, the one and only international rail link and four airports; as well as being the epicentre of the world's largest market for offshore wind energy, with expertise in all forms of energy generation.

Our area is also at the cutting-edge of digital innovation, with a globally competitive communications technology and digital creative sector anchored by nationally recognised tech clusters centred on Ipswich and Norwich's fast-growing digital creative hubs. Across Essex, the creative sector is expanding fast, with emerging concentrations of digital activity.

With specialisms in telecoms, cyber security, quantum technology, artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, user experience design, marine and microbiome research, our area has some of the highest concentrations of knowledge-intensive jobs in the UK. Home to the largest agri-food sector in the UK, it also boasts world-leading research into plant and soil technology, agricultural systems and health.

The population across Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk is set to rise significantly with around 320,000 new homes planned between 2016 and 2036, including the creation of a new generation of 'garden communities'. In total, 80,000 of these properties are expected to be built within a 15 mile radius of the GEML, representing a significant increase in the local population.

Our region is also vital to UK plc – being one of only two net contributor regions to the Treasury and generating a combined annual GVA of over £70 billion.

But future growth depends on our region being mobile and accessible and fundamental to this success is the quality and reliability of the GEML. It is the pivotal artery and the lifeblood for our economy.

Recent evidence shows that there is a strong and compelling case that investment in the GEML could generate up to £9.3bn in economic benefits across the region, once the wider agglomeration and productivity benefits are included.

The package of improvements identified in the Strategic Outline Business Case, which has been developed and financed through third parties - New Anglia LEP, Essex County Council, Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council – has the potential to create 5,100 new jobs in Norwich, 5,400 jobs in Ipswich, 10,000 jobs in Colchester, 8,400 jobs in Chelmsford and 3,700 new jobs in Southend.

The financial benefit of journey time savings is estimated at £6m annually. Over a 30-year period, journey time savings would equate to a total of £179m.

The total investment cost is estimated to be in the region of £660m with the Summary Business Case showing a Benefit to Cost ratio of 5.6 – which represents *very high* value for money and generating £5.60 of economic benefits for every pound of investment.

Investing in the Great Eastern Main Line not only brings significant benefits to our region, through the creation of new jobs, development land for homes and provides more opportunities for our residents, but it also supports national productivity and unlocks further funding for Government to invest across the UK.

We are looking to finalise the Strategic Outline Business Case for submission to Government in the Autumn – on the basis that funding is approved for Network Rail to progress the gap analysis work.

We ask you to give us this investment and, with it, the massive vote of confidence this region needs and deserves.

With best wishes,



Giles Watling MP
Chair of the GEML Rail Taskforce