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Heathrow connection High-speed rail link not a viable business platform

THE article on the Thames estuary airport was most interesting ("Foster: turn Heathrow into hi-tech haven", News, last week). Yet in all the debates and proposals concerning such a terminal, has any of proposers actually considered the role of the nation's hub airport and the UK regions it serves?

Heathrow's passengers come from far and wide, including most of the southern half of England and a great proportion of Wales. Why, therefore, would an airport that is so far east of London be deemed to suit their needs? They would all have to travel through or around London, placing great additional strain on transport infrastructure.

Other issues — each one massive in its own right — include safety, the continued need to overfly parts of the capital, Kent or Essex, the devastation caused to the economy of west London/the Thames corridor by the closure of Heathrow, plus immense air traffic management issues.

Heathrow is full now and additional airport capacity is required for the economy, so a debate is welcomed. However, the answer should not automatically be assumed to be the Thames estuary; all options need to be explored.

Michael Carrivick
Chief Executive, Board of
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THE Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group, Buckinghamshire Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Business, Institute of Directors and Buckinghamshire Business First collectively represent companies comprising hundreds of thousands of employees from across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire, and we have surveyed our members on the merits of the £33 billion high speed rail link between London and Birmingham ("£500m tunnel to buy off high speed rail critics" News, Last Week).

Overall, the responses from members and businesses concluded they were not convinced by the assumptions and calculations as articulated by Network Rail and High Speed Two. In short, they could not rely on the scheme's merits.

We acknowledge the suggestion of the £500m tunnel option under the Chiltern Hills (an area of outstanding natural

beauty), near Amersham and Little Missenden in Buckinghamshire. However, our members still contend that the business case is flawed: it will not cure the north-south divide; there are better alternatives to improving our railways; and the environmental case has no merit.

We believe that investment focused on shortening journey times between rail terminals and rural areas would have the same or greater impact. It would rely less on new track, be less expensive and less damaging to the environment. Business commuters are far more interested in the total time taken to complete a journey rather than the relatively small percentage reduction in intercity travel.

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The wrong track

If George Osborne can find billions to fund a high-speed rail scheme for which there is no private investment, an unproven business case, little discernible public demand, and vociferous opposition, it should not be too hard to persuade him to back a new London airport. While there will also be legitimate environmental arguments over an estuary airport, at least there would be private investment and an unassailable business case.

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