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Plans for Windsor rail link to Heathrow to be revived

17 JUL 2019 | BY KATHERINE SMALE

Plans to build a rail link to Heathrow via Windsor are to be revived after the scheme was [turned down by the Department for Transport](#) last year.

PODCAST

The Windsor Link Railway (WLR) scheme, which would provide a southern rail link to the airport in two phases, was rejected by the DfT when submitted as part of the government's [call for ideas for private investment – market led proposals \(MLPs\)](#).

After it was rejected, it emerged that because the scheme needed government backing to go forward it did not fit into the category 1 MLP which the DfT was looking for. Out of 30 schemes entered for the call for ideas only 10 are being taken forward on this basis.

But now the Windsor scheme is to be revived as part of Network Rail's enhancements pipeline process.

"We've now had clarification from the DfT that we simply weren't eligible for the MLP process, and it's now clear that no significant railway scheme will be as they will require backing from the government in some form," said WLR chief executive George Bathurst.

"So our options are to wait for a potential new call for ideas which might be eligible for, or enter it into the rail network enhancement process, which is what we're going to do."

Bathurst said he was very impressed with the way Network Rail was dealing with the plans and he expected to make a submission for the scheme to the track operator by the end of the month. He said he then hoped to receive feedback on it by the end of the summer.

The scheme is being backed by Skanska and is in direct competition with the [£1.2bn Aecom-backed Heathrow Southern Rail bid](#).

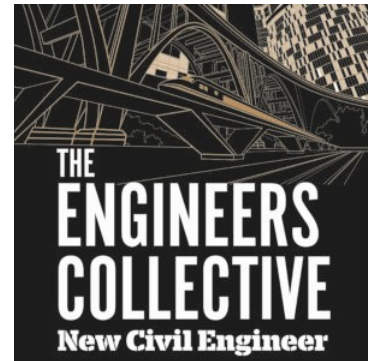
The scheme is pegged by Bathurst as providing a solution [to both the western and southern access to Heathrow in a two for one proposal](#).









During Phase 1 of WLR's proposal, short sections of new track and a tunnel would be built to connect Slough and Windsor to London Waterloo by linking up to the existing rail network.

Phase 2 would see a longer link providing southern access to Heathrow, which would then join existing rail lines providing services to the West.

A search by Network Rail to find a contractor to build its own scheme to provide a western rail connection into Heathrow was launched in June this year. However, it is yet to receive funding to carry out the works which is where Bathurst said the WLR scheme could be beneficial as it would provide a link but be privately funded and be independent of the Heathrow expansion.

"The [Network Rail] western access entails significant engineering risk, tunnelling through gravel and land fill as well as conflict with not just runway three but also HS2 and Crossrail and southern access," said Bathurst. "The most likely outcome now is that it will be dropped after Heathrow expansion gets Development Consent, as happened with AirTrack [a previous western scheme which was mothballed in 2010]."



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“The Windsor Link, by contrast, is independent of Heathrow expansion because a large part of its revenue is non-airport related.”

Bathurst said the scheme could not have come at a more critical time with the [publication of the government net zero targets](#) to try to decarbonise transport by 2050.

“The Windsor Link also has the best case of any rail scheme for Heathrow for reducing emissions, running parallel with the most congested section of the M25, serving our health and our planet better too,” he said.

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