

Mrs Anne Main M.P.

St Albans



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Ref: AM/CM

30 March 2017

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing regarding the proposed railfreight interchange in Park Street, St Albans.

As you will be aware, the development of a strategic railfreight interchange (SRFI) in St Albans has been highly controversial, and has been granted outline planning permission. After over a decade, the developer, Segro, will imminently make an offer to Hertfordshire Country Council to purchase the land and develop the site.

For many years now I have been implacably opposed to this development - not least because I have never had any substantive answers about SRFI's viability. Most recently I have been pushing Network Rail (NR) for answers relating to timetabling and the infrastructure upgrades necessary to make SRFI a properly functioning strategic site. That we are so close to the developer purchasing the land and beginning the works, and have had no answers to two extremely critical aspects, I think seriously undermines the viability of SRFI.

Constituents cannot possibly understand how it is they will be affected on their daily commuter train on the Midland Mainline (MML). They pay some of the highest fares per yard in the country, and since the works at London Bridge have had to endure an often extremely disrupted service. If we do not get answers on the post-2018 timetabling very soon, they will justifiably believe that the new passenger timetabling will not be compatible with freight on the MML. As I am sure you can appreciate, they are desperately unhappy about the prospect of further disruption to their daily lives.

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Under several governments it has long been a policy objective to move freight from road to rail. Whilst this may have been an overarching objective for many years, the reality has been that site after site throughout the country has struggled to become operational because the viability often does not make operational or commercial sense. Indeed, this for many years has been my biggest concern. I believe that it is likely that SRFI will eventually function simply as a lorry depot, putting further strain on the roads around St Albans, particularly the A414. This will mean that we will have lost the green belt, not for something that the people of St Albans want or need, but for something that will be entirely different than that which overcame the very significant planning requirements and constraints.

Given the exigent nature of the development, and the fact that we have had no answers from Network Rail or the developer, despite my numerous contacts with NR, I would greatly appreciate an urgent meeting with you, or indeed the rail minister. Oliver Dowden shares my concerns over SRFI; he too is extremely concerned over its viability.

Network Rail was pivotal in convincing the inspector of the very special circumstances of the development and its deliverability. I have always believed that their assurances were vague and unrealistic. As we have never seen any evidence of this, I think an urgent meeting to fully discuss these issues is entirely appropriate and necessary.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anne Main".

Anne Main MP

CC: Rt Hon Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
Hon Oliver Dowden MP CBE, Member of Parliament for Hertsmere