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All Interested Parties, Statutory Parties
and Other Persons

Your Ref:

Our Ref: TR040011

Date: 16 July 2020

Dear Sir/ Madam

**Planning Act 2008 (as amended) and The Infrastructure Planning
(Examination Procedure) Rules 2010 (as amended) – Rule 17**

**Application by North Somerset District Council for an Order Granting
Development Consent for the Portishead Branch Line – MetroWest Phase 1**

Request for further information

The purpose of this message is to provide you with an update on the progress of the application by North Somerset District Council for the Portishead Branch Line and to issue a request for further information from all Interested Parties.

The application is considered a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) which is a project considered by the Government to be over a certain size and of a type that is seen to be of national importance so that permission to build it needs to be given at national level by the relevant Secretary of State. Therefore, instead of applying to the local authority for planning permission, the applicant must apply to the Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) for a Development Consent Order (DCO). An overview of the NSIP process for members of the public and others can be found in [Advice Note 8](#) on the National Infrastructure Planning website.

In December 2019 the Inspectorate (on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport) accepted an application made by North Somerset District Council (the Applicant) for a DCO under the Planning Act 2008 (the application).

The application relates to the proposed re-opening for passenger services of the railway branch line between Portishead and Pill and Ashton Junction, Bristol (the Project). Details of the Project and copies of the application documents are available to view online through the [project page](#) of the National Infrastructure Planning website. Hard copies of the application are held at Portishead Library and Bristol Central Library. However, due to the present restrictions on opening due to COVID-19 it may not be possible to currently view these documents at these locations. Please check the relevant websites for further information.

In January 2020 the Applicant served [notice](#) of the acceptance of the application and invited representations to be made to the Inspectorate by the 26 February 2020.

Copies of the representations received by the Inspectorate can be viewed on the [project page](#) of the National Infrastructure Planning website. If you have made a valid representation to us, then you will be registered as an Interested Party and will have been provided with an individual reference number.

It has become clear that the public health situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect social movements, public gatherings and work practices.

At the same time, activity in the economy remains crucial, and businesses are adapting their procedures and ways of working to allow continued services and productivity. The Government recognises the importance of progressing the consideration and determination of applications for development, including NSIPs, and consequently we have been exploring ways of protecting public health while allowing the examination of the project to proceed in an open, fair and impartial manner.

To this end, the Inspectorate and the Examining Authority (ExA) are exploring the possibility of conducting the initial meeting, known as the Preliminary Meeting (where the ExA is to consider how the application would be examined) and subsequent Examination events either partially or wholly without the need for public gatherings. Any such changes to the established approach will be made in the context of the Examination being principally a written process, and with full regard to the applicable legislation, Government guidance and the Inspectorate's purposes and values and its Customer Charter, available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/607141/charter_final_eng.pdf).

Questionnaire

Under Rule 17 of The Infrastructure Planning (Examination Procedures) Rules 2010, in order to progress with the examination of this application, the ExA requests information from each of you about your availability and capability to engage with the Examination remotely, including the use of virtual events. Our specific questions are set out in this questionnaire:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=mN94WIhvg0iTIpmM5VcIjS9IDJ5KJ2BFIYALWSuJHWdUNVg1M09WTFo3UjZGNkIZQIhaN0ZPWec5US4u>

Your responses will help the ExA to decide:

- the format and arrangements for the Preliminary Meeting;
- what Hearings will be held; and
- what the arrangements and preparations for those Hearings will be.

Given current circumstances related to COVID-19, people may need to access events from their home, rather than their workplace or a public place. Please assume this to be the case. Could each person who may wish to speak at, or observe, the Preliminary Meeting and any Hearings complete the table of questions.

I would be grateful for your response to this request by **30 July 2020**. Whilst there may appear to be a lot of questions, please be assured of the importance of obtaining your answers. We consider it crucial to hear your views on the way in which the application should be examined and they will help us to finalise our arrangements in due course.

This is an information-gathering exercise only and it does not commit the ExA to any particular action. No date has yet been set for the Preliminary Meeting. The responses to the questionnaire will not be published as they are considered to relate to practical matters around the timing and organisation of Examination events and do not constitute submissions on the merits of the Proposed Development. As such, they will not influence our recommendation or, ultimately, the Secretary of State's decision.

I look forward to receiving your response to the questionnaire and thank everybody for their patience and understanding during these difficult times.

Yours faithfully,

Jo Dowling

Lead Member of the Panel of Examining Inspectors

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