OXFORDSHIRE
STRATEGIC RAIL FREIGHT INTERCHANGE

Statement of Common Ground between the Applicant and Network Rail

Document reference: 8.1

May 2026

RAIL STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND BETWEEN THE APPLICANT AND NR

1 Scope of Statement of Common Ground

1.1 The Applicant and NR acknowledge that this Statement of Common Ground is factual, and its purpose is to assist the Examining Authority on areas of agreement and disagreement in respect of the Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange Development Consent Order. The parties acknowledge that nothing contained herein is legally enforceable, nor is it intended to be or can be enforced as such.

1.2 This Statement of Common Ground is made between Oxfordshire Railfreight Ltd (**the Applicant**) and Network Rail Infrastructure Limited (**NR**) in relation to the application for a Development Consent Order (the **Order**) by the Applicant for the proposed Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (**OxSRFI**).

2 Relevant Background Documents

2.1 The following documents have informed this statement. Where indicated with an asterisk the documents were submitted with the application:

Department for Transport (DfT):

- Strategic Freight Network: The Longer-Term Vision 2009;
- Rail Freight Strategy 2016;
- Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail 2021;
- Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain 2021;
- The Future of Freight: A Long Term Plan 2022;
- Rail Freight Growth Target 2023;*
- National Networks National Policy Statement 2024;*
- The Railways Bill 2025;* and
- Better Connected: a strategy for integrated transport, 2nd April 2026.

NR:

- Freight Market Study 2013;
- Value and Importance of Rail Freight 2013;
- Freight Network Study 2016;
- Freight and National Passenger Operators Route Strategic Plan 2019;
- Freight Strategy - Summary Document 2021; and
- OxSRFI Feasibility Study Report 2022.*

The Applicant:

- Document 2.11A - Rail general arrangement drawings;*
- Document 2.11B and 2.11C – Rail sections;*
- Document 2.11D – Rail terminal drawings;*
- Document 7.2A – Rail Report;*
- Document 7.2B – GB Railfreight Supporting Statement;* and
- Document 7.2C – GB Railfreight Capacity Report.*

3 NR's support for rail freight growth

3.1 NR has invested heavily in facilitating national freight growth, and further freight enhancements are currently being planned and delivered. NR sees the traffic relevant to Strategic Rail Freight Interchanges (**SRFI**s) (intermodal, conventional wagon and express freight flows) as key to bringing about freight growth and modal shift from road to rail in Great Britain, across an expanding network providing direct links between regions, deepsea and shortsea ports, mainland Europe and now as far afield as China.[1]

3.2 In order to promote greater use of the rail network, NR's long-range planning process has involved a national Freight Market Study to consider growth in rail freight over the next 30 years, and a Freight Network Study to consider options for catering for this growth in the short to medium term, alongside the parallel development of High Speed 2 (HS2). NR's approach to assessing future demand anticipates that much of the onward growth in rail freight will be from traffic passing across an expanding network of geographically and/or co-located SRFI facilities.[2]

3.3 Since 1999, successive governments have consistently reiterated the need for greater modal shift of freight from road to rail.[3] The National Networks National Policy Statement (NNNPS) confirms that the Government is targeting at least a 75% growth in rail freight by 2050[4], and that SRFIs are crucial to achieving rail freight growth.[5] It also confirms that there remains a compelling need for a network of appropriately located SRFIs across all regions.[6] In particular, the NNNPS notes the need for SRFI capacity to be provided at a wide range of locations, both in regions where they are currently located and, more broadly, noting the particular challenge in expanding rail freight interchanges serving London and the South East.[7] The NNNPS notes that whilst there is likely to be a natural clustering of SRFI proposals in the distribution heartland of the nation (and further SRFI proposals in this area will continue to be important), consideration should be given to proposals for SRFIs where there is lesser provision.[8]

3.4 NR agrees with the NNNPS on the need for additional SRFIs to facilitate a greater modal shift from road to rail and to help facilitate the necessary growth in rail freight needed to meet the Government's targets. This will help to boost the economy by overcoming road congestion and making the logistics industry more productive. It will also help Britain to meet its carbon reduction targets and thus make economic growth more sustainable, and ensure that the wider socio-economic benefits of rail freight are captured in the South East, which has accounted for just 5% of these benefits in recent years.[9] NR is therefore working with a number of developers who are seeking to promote modal shift through SRFI developments[10], expanding the quantum of distribution floorspace capable of being rail-served, from its low level of provision compared to the equivalent scale of road-served floorspace.

3.5 OxSRFI is therefore aligned with NR's corporate policy on encouraging growth in rail freight traffic and supporting the need for a network of SRFIs.

4 NR's involvement with the development

[1] A freight train carrying goods from China arrived in London in January 2017
[2] Freight Market Study (NR 2013), Introduction / sections 3.1 to 3.3
[3] Sustainable Distribution: A Strategy (DfT 1999), Transport 2010, The 10 Year Plan (DfT 2000), Delivering a Sustainable Railway (DfT 2007), Strategic Freight Network: The Longer-Term Vision (DfT 2009), Logistics Growth Review (DfT 2011), NPS (DfT 2014), plus documents as listed on page 1
[4] Para 2.3
[5] Para 3.99
[6] Para 3.100-3.103
[7] Para 3.105
[8] Para 3.106
[9] Assessing the Value of Rail Freight, Deloitte for Rail Delivery Group, April 2021, page 8
[10] Freight & National Passenger Operators Route Strategic Plan, March 2019, page 103

4.1 NR has been working with the Applicant to develop this new SRFI, which should help contribute to achieving these modal shift goals. The development site is located on one of the routes comprising the Strategic Freight Network, a collection of core and diversionary routes which are, or are intended to be, capable of accommodating high-cube shipping containers and 775m length trains. The route has previously been used as a diversionary route for intermodal trains to and from the Channel Tunnel during the upgrading of the West Coast Main Line.

4.2 Located in the South East and close to Junction 10 of the M40 (the NNNPS recognises there are particular challenges in expanding SRFI in the South East and London), where there is currently no provision of SRFI, the site provides an opportunity to respond to the NNNPS by expanding the network of SRFI across the regions and by so doing help stimulate and accommodate future intermodal traffic growth.

5 Engagement with the Applicant

5.1 The Applicant first engaged with NR formally in 2019 and has continued to do so to ensure that NR's technical resources, in regard to feasibility and early design, are consulted as the design evolves.

5.2 In September 2020, NR and the Applicant entered into a Basic Services Agreement, and in June 2021 entered into a Basic Asset Protection Agreement. These Agreements facilitated services relevant to technical workstreams commensurate with this stage in the development of the SRFI proposals.

5.3 In line with NR's approach on similar exercises undertaken for other SRFI schemes, the project has progressed through PACE Phase 1 , Engineering Stage 2; an appropriate level of detail for a SRFI to reach prior to the submission of an application for a DCO, as acknowledged by the Secretary of State for Transport on a different project.[11] Having assessed the national rail network in terms of capacity, capability and engineering design feasibility, the project was temporarily paused in 2023 to focus on highway design work. Development work re-started in 2024, with further assessment of the proposals continuing through the existing agreements with NR. The Parties acknowledge that further agreements will be needed.

5.4 The parties have worked together since September 2020 through regular meetings and workshops. A series of meetings have been held with NR's Sponsor and a range of internal stakeholders and respective disciplines. These discussions have focussed on the most efficient way of delivering the design and specification of the main line connections.

5.5 An Agreed Position Statement was produced by the parties ahead of the first round of non-statutory public consultation in 2022 and updated in 2025 ahead of the second round of statutory public consultation. The second Agreed Position Statement has been submitted with the main DCO Application. This is now superseded by this expanded Statement of Common Ground.

6 NR's infrastructure and connections to OxSRFI

6.1 NR has contributed to the Applicant's development of initial proposals since 2019. Areas of discussion regarding the development have included:

- **Design and operations** (the feasibility of the proposals to be constructed and operated): NR has been engaged to review and refine the Applicant's proposals. At the time of drafting, NR is reasonably satisfied the SRFI is capable of being connected to the main line from both directions with the capability to handle 775 metre trains, in line with the NNNPS. The site can accommodate

[11] Northampton Gateway Rail Freight Interchange Order decision letter, Department for Transport 9th October 2019, para 27

trains using diesel or bi-mode traction (as the Chiltern Main Line is currently not electrified), and electric traction in the event that the main line is electrified in future;

- **Pathing** (the ability to schedule freight trains to and from the site amongst other scheduled services): NR has reviewed pathing studies undertaken by the Applicant using the December 2019, May 2020 and May 2025 Working Timetables. In each case, the studies have identified that there are at least four compliant return paths per day for the SRFI (i.e., 4 paths into the site and 4 paths out of the site per day). The 4 return paths identified have been subject to external peer review by GB Railfreight, an external licenced rail freight operating company working on behalf of the Applicant, as well as by NR. Additional compliant paths have also been found by GB Railfreight that could be used. Based on the work to date, the SRFI can be served by at least 4 freight trains a day, which aligns with the qualifying criteria to make OxSRFI a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project under the Planning Act 2008[12] and in the NNNPS.[13] Further information on the train planning process is set out in Section 8 and in Appendix A;

- **Gauging** (the ability to move intermodal units, such as shipping containers and swapbodies by rail to and from the site through existing lineside and overline structures): a series of gauging assessments have been undertaken by the parties using asset data on clearances between the main line tracks and lineside / overline structures. The work has assessed the availability of W8 container loading gauge clearance across 52 miles of route between Banbury (Aynho Junction) and London (West Ealing Junction) involving over 1,300 individual lineside structures. All locations but one have been found to be already clear to W8 gauge, reflecting in part the previous use of the line by intermodal trains (see earlier). Attention is now focussed on a single structure (Ardley Tunnel) where minor remediation works would be required to a short section of the tunnel lining facing the southbound running line, to remove a build-up of calcite and achieve W8 gauge. Further design will be undertaken by the parties to confirm the scope of the works to this structure, which will be funded by the Applicant (the delivery approach is yet to be determined between NR and the Applicant). Based on the work to date, the main line is capable of enhancement to W8 loading gauge, in line with the NNNPS;[14]

- **Track** (the ability to achieve a track layout compliant with rail industry design standards): NR has reviewed the initial concept drawings and specification, which provides compliant geometries and standard configurations for switch and crossing equipment (which allow trains to diverge and join the main line from the SRFI site). NR has made comments and suggested changes which will be incorporated into the design process;

- **Signalling** (the ability to move trains safely and efficiently to and from the main line): the Applicant has commenced early engagement with NR in advance of the signalling design and specification, NR has made comments and suggested changes which will be incorporated into the design process. An illustrative signalling scheme plan has been presented to and the concept reviewed by the local Principal Route Engineer's team and the national Major Schemes Review Panel chair;

- **Electrification and plant**: NR has noted the need for changes to the existing plant and low-voltage equipment around the connections into the SRFI. The results will be incorporated into the downstream detailed design. The design of the SRFI has been future-proofed to be compatible with electrification of the Chiltern Main Line, which remains an aspiration of the rail industry;

[12] Part 3, Section 26, para 4b
[13] Para 4.89
[14] Para 4.82

- **Level crossings**: NR supports in principle the proposal to close the existing Bucknells Farm level crossing by re-routing the footpath onto a grade-separated crossing via an adjacent existing overbridge. No other level crossings will require amendments on the Chiltern Main Line; and
- **Other**: early feedback from civil engineering, geotechnical, telecoms and other disciplines have been taken into account through a series of discussions with the local Principal Route Engineers.

6.2 The OxSRFI proposals will not only deliver substantial investment and rail freight traffic to the national rail network, but will also provide benefits to the wider rail industry. These include:

- **Safety**: closure of Bucknell Farm level crossing would eliminate an at-grade crossing and the associated risks to users of the crossings and of rail services. This fully aligns with NR's stated policy which seeks to close as many of these crossings nationally as reasonably practicable;
- **Signalling**: the proposals will significantly improve the headway (minimum time between successive train passes in the same direction of travel) between Aynho Junction and Bicester from 5 minutes at present to 3 minutes, improving route capacity in both directions for all train operators, as reasonably demonstrated in the most recent pathing study undertaken in May 2025;
- **Engineering access**: additional access points will be provided to the main line for NR personnel, vehicles, on track plant (such as tampers and stoneblowers) and road rail vehicles. This will reduce the time taken to deploy personnel and equipment to and from the main line, reducing the time otherwise required for engineering possessions of the main line;
- **Operational resilience**: the site will provide facilities for the stabling and light maintenance of rolling stock and locomotives, which may enable faster recovery of failed trains on the local network than possible from existing operating bases elsewhere. Drainage improvements (see below) will also reduce the incidence of flooding on the main line, reducing service disruption;
- **Loading gauge**: clearance of the 50-mile Chiltern Main Line from W7 to W8 gauge will improve the capability of the Chiltern Main Line to accommodate intermodal freight traffic, enhancing its role as part of the Strategic Freight Network (SFN), as well as the overall capability of the wider network;
- **Drainage**: the drainage proposals will assist in moving groundwater and run-off away from the Chiltern Main Line towards the south and west, addressing an existing issue with flooding; and
- **Ardley passenger station**: the parties are aware of separate third-party aspirations to reinstate a passenger station within the Ardley area following the closure of the former station in 1963. The Applicant does not require any station to be reinstated or delivered as part of its proposals. OxSRFI would not prejudice the future provision by others of a passenger station if this were to be delivered in its former location, as the Site will not intrude on any part of the former Ardley station footprint. The proposed additional main line signalling for OxSRFI could also support passenger trains calling at a reinstated station if this were to be delivered in its former location, reducing complexity, cost and programme.

7 Protections for the Rail Network

7.1 If the OxSRFI Order is granted, it is standard practice for NR to require the Order to include Protective Provisions. The Applicant accepts that provisions to protect NR's statutory undertaking should be provided and is working to agree appropriate wording with NR for such protection.

7.2 The Applicant proposes the inclusion of a range of powers, including powers of compulsory acquisition, which would allow the Applicant to acquire permanent rights over part of the operational railway. NR objects to the use of compulsory acquisition but will work constructively with the Applicant to agree the necessary property and asset protection documents that provide the Applicant, subject to the necessary

safeguards having been agreed, with the property rights that it needs to enable its scheme to proceed, but subject always to the relevant process and approvals (in NR's absolute discretion) first being in place.

7.3 NR requires its standard Protective Provisions to be included on any version of the Order should the Application be accepted for examination (and consequently made). This is so that NR is not put in a position where the Applicant could compulsorily acquire rights over the railway without NR consent or use land belonging to NR without the necessary approvals, conditions, limitations, and restrictions being in place in order for NR to meet its regulatory requirements.

7.4 The Applicant and NR are confident that agreement on appropriate provisions can be reached before the end of Examination and will continue to update the Planning Inspectorate on the progress of such agreement.

7.5 The parties acknowledge that the Secretary of State for Transport will wish to see clear evidence of discussions and agreement regarding the planned timeframe for the delivery and commissioning of the rail network connections. The parties agree that a detailed programme cannot be determined prior to the Order and associated Protective Provisions being in place, and a substantive part of the remaining phases and stages of PACE are completed, at least to Engineering Stage 4. NR will then be required to provide sufficient notice to train operators to plan around the rail works. The timeframe will also be influenced by areas outside of the parties' direct control, such as the rail industry Network Change consultation process, or negotiations with external stakeholders. On this basis, it is agreed that delivery and commissioning of the rail network connections could not be achieved in any less than three years from Determination.

8 On-site rail freight interchange facilities

8.1 NR has had the opportunity to undertake a detailed review with the Applicant of the rail facilities proposed for the development. Although most of the sidings and terminal facilities fall beyond NR's network and responsibilities, NR has a strong interest in their capability and capacity, particularly as relates to the main line connections and associated signalling, some of which will be installed on site.

8.2 NR needs assurance of an efficient off-network operation to ensure that trains enter and leave the network at speed and on time. From the assumptions made by the Applicant and in the layout designs, capacity modelling, the timetable and pathing studies done so far, and based on experiences of other schemes, NR believes that the facilities being planned should have the capability and capacity to provide an efficient operation for the train numbers envisaged. This view is informed by the knowledge that:

- train numbers will build up over time so the mitigation for any emerging issues can be tackled at an early stage; and
- NR would expect to work closely with the facility operator on an ongoing basis to review joint issues of efficiency and performance.

9 Capacity of the national network

9.1 NR's ability to accommodate the anticipated rail traffic from the SRFI, factors will include:

- the particular time and day that operators bid for paths;
- the working timetable including the speed and frequency of trains on the surrounding network;
- the destinations which the SRFI will connect to;
- the match between network paths and SRFI access on site and at origin / destination;
- the primary routing and acceptable alternatives; and
- the type of equipment (e.g. locomotives) in use and related train speed/acceleration.

9.2 An explanation of the process by which paths are applied for by operators is attached at Appendix A.

9.3 As the Chiltern Main Line is a principal main line route, introducing a location with trains accessing and exiting the main line network at relatively low speeds might create problems of capacity and performance. The differential between a 100mph passenger train and a freight train accelerating from or decelerating into the site at lower speeds could introduce performance risks into the Working Timetable.

9.4 As noted in Section 6, a series of pathing studies across multiple annual timetables have identified 4 compliant return paths per day for the SRFI. Post-determination, as the layout design proposals are progressed through NR's PACE process, greater design detail and definition will be undertaken on the underpinning Timetable Planning Rules (e.g. sectional running times, headway, and junction margins), alongside the proposed Common Safe System of Working and associated track layout and signalling functionality. This will achieve the most effective means of pathing trains on and off the Chiltern Main Line. This will include both NR's and on-site signalling and interfaces, through further engagement with NR and the wider rail industry as part of the Network Change process.

9.5 Rail freight demand through SRFIs tends to grow incrementally. Because of this, whilst the ultimate capacity could not be made available from the outset (nor would it be needed), capacity could be available for future growth of the development in the context of developing the rail network in line with long-term approach to planning, which assumes the majority of new rail freight growth will come from SRFIs such as this.

9.6 In the short term, judicious use of the network continues to create further capacity for new traffic, through measures such as better timetabling, more efficient operations and longer trains, as well as exploiting the continued move away from relatively slow and heavy services for bulk commodities such as coal, towards intermodal and other non-bulk traffic. This provides some confidence that future traffic growth can take place without the need to always build additional capacity.

9.7 In the medium to long term, NR is developing freight capacity and capability during its current funding Control Period. Future funding is yet to be determined, but the rail planning processes NR now has in place create the optimum environment for continued rail freight development and growth over time.

9.8 Government has reiterated support for rail freight through the NNNPS and the Rail Freight Growth Target. The approach taken by NR to its long-term forecasting of rail freight growth relates to SRFI and other key market sectors. NR and the Applicant believe that this is due to recognition that rail freight has an important role to play in the UK economy, and that continuing with investments that help its efficiency and success is good for the UK's industrial productivity, economic growth and the environment. In the longer term, the projected opening of HS2 during the 2030s is expected to attract significant passenger demand and free up capacity for freight and passenger growth on the existing network.

9.9 The Department for Transport's longer-term vision and growth target for rail freight sets out what the Government and industry expect to achieve over time.

10 Railways Bill (Bill 373 2024-26) and proposed rail industry restructuring

10.1 The Railways Bill was introduced to Parliament in November 2025. The primary purpose of the Bill is to enable the creation of Great British Railways (GBR), a new publicly owned body which will be the directing mind taking responsibility for the railway infrastructure (e.g. tracks, bridges, tunnels and stations) and most passenger train services (freight services to remain separately operated as at present). This means the Bill aims to bring "track and train" together.

10.2 The new rail system that is established by the Bill is designed to better meet the needs and expectations of those who rely on it and support the Government's growth agenda. The Bill will *inter alia* establish

GBR, set out its functions and duties, provide funding and establish an 'access regime' that allows GBR to make decisions on which services can access the tracks.[15]

Signed on behalf of NR	[redacted] .30-04-26…… [redacted]	Signed on behalf of the Applicant	…[redacted]
Position	Operations Director and Deputy Route Director, Central Route	Position	Managing Director
Date		Date	13/05/2026

[15] Railways Bill Explanatory Notes, Department for Transport, November 2025

APPENDIX to OxSRFI NR ORL Statement of Common Ground March 2026

1 HOW DOES THE FREIGHT PATHING PROCESS WORK?

This appendix explains the process involved in the identification and allocation of capacity on the national rail network. It has been prepared in the form of Questions and Answers.

1.1 Who makes decisions regarding the rail timetable?

1.2 Network Rail makes the decisions about which mix of services are entered into any timetable.

1.3 Its Objective (as defined in Part D of the Network Code[16]) is to share capacity on the Network for the safe carriage of passengers and goods in the most efficient and economical manner in the overall interest of current and prospective users and providers of railway services. This is set out in the Part D of the Network Code.

1.4 Where there is a potential conflict between services, Network Rail will consider a set of Decision Criteria from Part D of the Network Code, deciding which are relevant to the particular circumstances, then apply those it has identified as relevant in order to reach a decision which is fair and not unduly discriminatory as between any individual affected train operators.

1.5 Network Rail will decide which of the Decision Criteria are the most important in the circumstances and use them with an appropriate weighting to decide how, and if, competing train paths are accepted into the timetable.

1.6 If a train operator disagrees with any of Network Rail's decisions in what goes into a timetable, it can use the industry's appeal procedure to challenge the decision.

1.7 How often is the timetable changed?

1.8 There is a requirement for the timetable to change twice a year, every year, as defined in the Network Code. This is the time when Network Rail can look at the complete set of passenger and freight requirements and adjust train paths to endeavour to accommodate all requests.

1.9 How are freight paths allocated alongside passenger service paths?

1.10 When compiling a timetable, Network Rail must assess all operators' requirements together and not look at freight services after passenger services, or vice versa. Paths are allocated based on an operator's rights.[17]

1.11 Many train operators (both passenger and freight) will have Firm Rights in their Track Access Contracts for specific services to be present in any timetable, within certain time-bands, and Network Rail, first and foremost, must satisfy those requirements. There are also other classes of rights which dictate in what order bids should be accommodated in the timetable and with what priority. Such a process may need to take into account the Decision Criteria described in section 1.1 above.

1.12 A significant difference in the approach to pathing between passenger and freight trains is that the latter will typically be held at various points between origin and destination, from minutes to hours, to allow faster (typically passenger) trains to pass. A number of passing loops and regional hub yards across the

[16] The Network Code is a set of rules incorporated into track access contracts between train operators and Network Rail.
[17] Operator rights are specified in passenger Train Operating Companies' (TOCs) and Freight Operating Companies' (FOCs) Track Access Contracts. These will vary, with specified arrival and departure time windows, any stops, and other characteristics necessary for Network Rail to process and enter the train paths into a timetable.

network are used as laybys to allow freight trains to be held clear of the main line. In addition, freight trains can also be held at key junctions for several minutes when necessary to await an onward path.

1.13 How do freight operating companies apply for paths?

1.14 As well as being able to change the timetable they wish to run twice a year (see section 1.2), freight operating companies (FOCs) are also able to apply to Network Rail for a freight path at any time.

1.15 This ability for freight companies to make a spot bid into the timetable exists because FOCs need to be able to quickly respond to spot markets of business that come their way at very short notice. This is a fundamental difference to how passenger operating companies respond to their markets and has been recognised as such in how the Network Code was written and approved.

1.16 The difference between these two methods of applying for freight paths is that, when making a spot bid during the course of a timetable, the FOC itself must ensure that the application for a freight path does not clash with any other established service.

1.17 Does a simple analysis of the spare paths in the current timetable show what the capacity of the network is and what paths would be available to new freight services?

1.18 There is no simple analysis of a timetable to determine the true capacity of the network. It is often the case that the timetable in question isn't always optimised to best capacity and, by reviewing a timetable, a better fit of trains can be achieved. Examples of how a timetable might be optimised include:

- removing unnecessary time in a schedule following other services; and
- investigating putting faster running trains in front of slower ones and ensuring a timetable has sufficient space in it to cater for new services.

1.19 There is a balance to be struck between filling every spare path on any line of route to maximise efficiency, and the need to have fire breaks in the timetable, such that there is space to recover from disruption to services and/or infrastructure (perturbation in railway terminology).

1.20 Is it possible that there could be no spare paths in a current timetable but through a review of the timetable additional freight services could be accommodated?

1.21 This is possible and has previously been shown to be the case. Any pathing study is reflective of the current timetable which is subject to change (see sections 1.1 and 1.2 earlier). Paths that are no longer required are removed from the timetable and those paths that remain are often able to be altered to better use the existing capacity. This, in turn, often releases capacity for new freight services.

1.22 The production of new timetables also offers the opportunity for Network Rail to flex train paths to accommodate new services.

1.23 How are timetables reviewed to accommodate new services?

1.24 Timetables are not routinely reviewed other than in response to timetable review requests (section 1.2). Often, a passenger or freight operator will examine the detail of how a particular timetable has been put together and will suggest changes to be made in order for one of its new services to be accommodated. Network Rail will then examine the proposal and accept it or reject it.

1.25 There is a team within Network Rail who actively look to incorporate useful Strategic Capacity train paths into the timetable, taking into account the projected growth in freight services from Network Rail's established Freight Market Study.[18]

1.26 Have there been situations on the network where rail freight services have not been capable of being accommodated?

1.27 There has not been a situation whereby a new freight facility has been unable to operate due to a lack of train paths. If paths cannot be accommodated, then a route can be deemed to be congested and Network Rail works to produce a plan to de-congest the route. The Chiltern Main Line is not designated as congested.

1.28 A great deal of iterative work often goes into the development of a freight path. For example, it would be challenging to run a freight service along a busy commuter railway during a busy peak period. Freight train operators will therefore tend to look at pathing trains through busier sections of route during off-peak / intra-peak periods. Finding a freight path is a balance of timing and resource utilisation.

1.29 The Government and Network Rail support an increase in rail freight and increases in rail freight are anticipated in the future. Within this context why is there not greater certainty about the ability to accommodate paths from new SRFI?

1.30 Whilst it is possible to look at pathing arrangements for new facilities in relation to the current timetable, as answers to the above questions demonstrate, the timetable is subject to review and is not a fixed position unlike, for example, highway infrastructure.

1.31 Network Rail is required to have regard to the needs of all rail users. It recognises that the intermodal market is one of the key sectors that is driving rail freight growth and the desired modal shift from road to rail.

1.32 In the Freight & National Passenger Operators Route Strategic Plan[19], Network Rail addresses the interests of all rail users and indicates its programme to accommodate them. The plan sets out the first stage of a longer-term vision to facilitate significant rail growth over the next fifteen years.[20]

1.33 The ability to accommodate growth also depends on the nature, speed and length of the traffic flow. It may for example be possible to get a path to and from a site near Bicester, but not be possible to find a matching path to a busy port such as Felixstowe or Southampton in order that the service can run profitably. This comes back to the iterative development process referred to above.

[18] Statement of Common Ground, Section 2.1.1
[19] Statement of Common Ground, Section 2.1.1
[20] Foreword, Page 3