Publication of the UK Government’s 2019 Clean Air Strategy in January highlighted once again the urgent need to tackle harmful emissions from across the transport industries. Heathrow Southern Railway Limited (HSRL) immediately drew attention to Section 5 of the Strategy which highlighted the environmental benefits of rail for the conveyance of people and goods as well as the role of modal shift away from road in reducing emissions.

Readers of Rail Professional will recall from my article in last October’s edition how HSRL is striving to provide a privately financed, designed, built and operated solution to the decades-long conundrum of a southern rail link to Heathrow Airport. We believe that the existing air quality emergency in southwest London – which is undoubtedly largely the result of illegal levels of air quality around Heathrow caused

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The Southern Rail Link

Successful Southern Rail Link to Heathrow requires cooperation between Government, private sector and stakeholders, Graham Cross, Chief Executive at Heathrow Southern Railway explains why
by road traffic – requires real urgency from public agencies to cooperate with the private sector to facilitate such a rail link.

Recent suggestions that Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL) will apply to lift the maximum permitted number of flights by 25,000 per year using the existing two runways makes it even more imperative that surface access improvements by public transport do not have to wait almost a decade for completion of the third runway. We believe our own project promotion organisation embodies the theme of cooperation, embracing as it does substantial figures from transport and business amongst the founders along with the expertise of our investor, international engineering and construction consultancy AECOM. Having spent several million pounds over two and a half years developing our scheme, we are now at a crucial point where we await the Department for Transport (DfT) setting out its next steps.

The DfT say they need to spend some time defining the outcomes they want any private sector promoter of a Southern Rail Link to Heathrow (SRLTH) to achieve, and in working out a commercial model for engaging the market. Whilst Transport Ministers and other branches of the Government continue to express positive aspirations such as sustainable housing and important future issues such as our own work is that of minimising disruption on the surface and at Heathrow. Each HEATOWN planner had the foresight to make space for when Terminal 5 was constructed. HAL is the owner of Heathrow Southern Railway Limited.

We envisage bringing into use the two extra platforms which the previous generation of Heathrow planners had the foresight to make space for when Terminal 5 was constructed. HAL is the owner of Heathrow Southern Railway Limited.
this facility, so we will need to work closely with them in the design, construction, connection and long-term operation of our new section of railway.

Whilst we will be free to take opportunities to procure railway construction in a more efficient way by pursuing our own standards and strategies, our new railway will be connected seamlessly with the existing infrastructure of Network Rail. Fundamental to our view of the role for our new railway is that, in terms of planning and operation, it will function as an integrated part of the national system. Passengers will not even notice that they have transferred from one owner's infrastructure to another. But this end cannot merely be willed – it must be worked towards.

Also important for our work with Network Rail is alignment with their own promotion of a Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLTH) which will make use of the same Terminal 5 station as SRLTH and is expected to accommodate trains which will need to share access to existing infrastructure with services on the southern link.

Last but by no means least comes our relationship with Transport for London (TfL) and the capital’s Mayoral team as these are already the source of major improvements to rail access at Heathrow by means of Crossrail (Elizabeth Line) and the upgraded Piccadilly Line. We responded to the Mayor’s consultation on his Transport Strategy and continue to make TfL aware of our progress.

Yet, I am compelled at the end of this article to return to the issue of urgency. This is because our cooperation with all stakeholders and related organisations is constrained by their quite proper reluctance to be seen as endorsing one of a number of possible solutions for a new southern rail link to Heathrow. We are eager to see a full competition run by the DfT – a competition we will of course do our very best to win – so that a preferred promoter can be selected and all of these inhibitions to cooperation can be removed.

In concluding, I refer back once again to the UK Government’s Clean Air Strategy and the role of rail in meeting its objectives. Heathrow Southern Railway is forecast to eliminate around 86 million car kilometres per year, yielding a saving of around 8,600 tonnes of carbon dioxide and two tonnes of nitrogen oxides annually.

There is an ever growing worldwide urgency in the need to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases such as CO2, whilst millions of residents in London and Surrey affected by toxic emissions cannot be expected to tolerate the intolerable for a day longer than is absolutely necessary. We stand ready to bring a degree of mitigation to their plight.

Graham Cross is Chief Executive at Heathrow Southern Railway Limited

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