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Mr Neil Ross
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Centro
Centro House
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25th February 2013

Dear Mr Ross

As the Managing Director of GB Railfreight, I want to thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the West Midlands Metropolitan Area Freight Strategy.

By way of introduction, GB Railfreight (GBRf) is one of the most dynamic companies in the railway industry. It is a rapidly growing business, having gone from 2 employees in 1999 to over 400 staff today, and it operates around 650 trains a week in the UK. Within the West Midlands, GBRf transports trains of scrap from the Birmingham area to Cardiff; it operates regular intermodal services from Felixstowe across the West Midlands; and also conducts various other services which pass through the West Midlands area.

GBRf welcomes Centro's decision to "enhance freight movements" across the region. As you recognise, rail freight is one of the most effective ways to transport goods across the West Midlands and the country as a whole, and it is vital to the smooth running of Britain's economy. According to the Office of Rail Regulation, the industry is responsible for moving over 100 million tonnes of goods across the country every year (October 2009).

In order to maintain and further grow the freight industry, it is essential that UK policy-makers at all levels create suitable conditions for rail freight operators to move across the country. It is often the case that policy and politics are heavily passenger-focused. This means that the rail freight industry can be overlooked and not given due consideration by policy-makers. As such, we welcome this strategy as recognition of the strategic importance of freight and as an opportunity to develop suitable conditions for the freight sector over the next twenty years.

Establishing freight in its wider context

From our experience of operating in the rail freight industry, we believe that the major issue which stands in the way of maximising the full potential of rail freight is that freight is considered in a standalone manner rather than as part of a wider picture. Whilst the freight industry has seen



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significant growth over the past twenty years, further growth has been hindered as a result of a lack of joined-up thinking between and across local and national Governments.

The Nuneaton North Chord (NNC) is a good example of the consequences of a failing to consider freight within such a framework. We support the NNC as an important element in creating a vital freight corridor from the Port of Felixstowe to the Midlands and the North West. However, the Government's plans to electrify parts of the rail network do not include the busy Nuneaton – Felixstowe corridor that would enable locomotives to haul containers to the Suffolk port and to capitalise fully on the NNC.

We welcome the fact that Centro recognise the strategic importance of freight and the need to "prioritise and coordinate investment". However, the fruits of this investment can only be realised if it is considered in light of the current national network and future investment plans. Therefore, we recommend that all of Centro's proposals are first and foremost considered within a national framework instead of in a stand-alone manner.

Comment on specific proposals

In terms of the specific proposals outlined in your freight strategy, I would urge you to consider the following when looking at the West Midlands Strategic Freight Corridor and the Black County Freight Gateway Intermodal Rail Freight Interchange.

- Proposal D: West Midlands Strategic Freight Corridor

GBRf is encouraged by the suggestion of a route which may travel around Birmingham. It is, however, interested in learning more about the markets which it might serve. It should be noted that GBRf is hesitant about track sharing Tram-train schemes. This can be extremely difficult to facilitate given the significant safety issues whenever heavy and light rail operates on the same line.

- Proposal M: Black County Freight Gateway Intermodal Rail Freight Interchange

GBRf believes that the Black County Freight Gateway Interchange has the potential to be a good idea. However, it is vital that this is seen in light of existing rail freight terminals in the Birmingham area.

Thank you again for taking the time to consult with us. This letter has provided me with an opportunity to share our initial thoughts on the strategy with you. We would be delighted to discuss any of the above in greater detail. With this in mind, please feel free to get in touch with my office about arranging a follow up meeting with myself or a colleague. To arrange a meeting please call Nicola Minford on 020 3997 2414 or email nicola.minford@westbournecoms.com.

Yours sincerely



John Smith, Managing Director



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