

Outer London Commission

Submission from West London Business

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Introduction

1. West London Business (WLB) welcomes the establishment of the Outer London Commission (OLC) and supports its objectives to enhance the economic development of the Outer London boroughs. WLB welcomes this opportunity to respond to the OLC and presents a broad view from the West London business sector.
2. WLB is the Chamber of Commerce and business retention agency for west London. We represent some seven hundred members and affiliates including such leading names as GSK, HSBC, Diageo, BAA, BBC and British Airways. We work closely with businesses and with the six west London boroughs in the West London Partnership, with the aim of promoting West London as a destination for investment and enhancing the business environment in this area. This work involves us in supporting the London Development Agency, Think London and Business Link. We also manage a business support consortium funded by the LDA, which brings together eight delivery partners across London in delivering business support services.
3. West London is a large and dynamic economy in its own right, producing a GVA of £32.4 billion in 2005. It benefits from a number of key business drivers – such as Heathrow Airport (160 000 direct and indirect jobs), Park Royal Commercial Estate (40 000 jobs), the Golden Mile Business District and town centres such as Hammersmith, Ealing, Uxbridge, Harrow, Hayes and Hounslow. West London provides more than 750 000 jobs in total, and 60 percent of its residents work within the area. Enjoying effective radial transport links and Heathrow airport has made west London a successful destination for attracting business. It offers a relatively well developed property sector and a skilled work force. For these reasons west London contributes a greater share of Gross Added Value to the London economy than other outer London sub-regions.

On the other hand, West London has suffered from relative underinvestment in suburban town centres and public transport infrastructure (compare to East London). The sub-region also has several areas of high deprivation, in need of regeneration and investment.

4. WLB is not convinced that the super-hub approach is the most appropriate solution for West London, with its unique characteristics, and notes the opposition of the local authorities here to the concept. Any investment planning needs to result in benefits for the whole sub-region and it will be very difficult to define the criteria for selecting specific areas for super-hubs. If super-hubs are the chosen solution they will have to be selected on the basis of a locality which offers some existing infrastructural and business base (i.e. it is not purely a regeneration exercise). They will have to offer some existing transport links and be suitable for mixed-use development to stimulate and concentrate further business growth. The objective should be to stimulate further sustainable, long-term economic development both in the immediate hub and beyond, but not focussing purely on employment. We feel that any investment in hubs should be such that it benefits the broader sub-regional area through improved transport links and business stimulation.

(A) Economic

1) Why has Outer London growth in employment lagged behind that of Inner and Central London and that of the South East?

High growth industries, such as finance and business services, have clustered in the City and Canary Wharf. These industries have benefited from national policy support and London government support, which has directed investment into those areas and favoured a “Centric” approach to development. West London’s traditional industries, which boosted the area in the past – such as manufacturing and back office support -- have emigrated in the search for lower costs. Newer, growing industries have provided lower employment levels.

Employment growth has also been hampered by a lack of mixed-use development, capable of attracting the talent, skills and investment needed by large and high-growth industries. There has also been a dearth of investment in public transport, which has hindered movement of staff and goods. Parking restrictions in new developments have encouraged movement out to the Thames Valley and other contiguous areas. West London still suffers from a number of areas of deprivation and low skill levels.

Furthermore, inflexible planning frameworks have resulted in development being hindered. The housing stock has also not been sufficiently modernised and upgraded. These factors have put a brake on new investment from incoming or existing businesses.

2) What factors have contributed to the uneven performance of economic sectors and geographic areas in Outer London? Why have some economic sectors prospered and others declined? Why have some areas done better and others worse?

Success has depended on:

- The availability of a range of good quality commercial and industrial premises
- Ease of access owing to good road and public transport links
- Flexible and visionary planning and parking policies locally
- The attractiveness and vibrancy of town centres
- Availability of suitably skilled labour
- The effects of clustering and reputation (i.e. Hammersmith, White City, BBC – creative industries; Park Royal – food processing)
- Public sector engagement and flexibility towards business and new development

3) Overall, what are the main barriers to economic and employment growth in Outer London and what factors need to be addressed to allow the region to fulfil its economic potential? In particular, what investments are needed (particularly transport, both private/public, and education/skills and business support) to best ensure employment growth to 2031 either in existing or new sectors?

Barriers to growth

- Lack of investment in transport infrastructure – particularly north-south
- Lack of planning and parking flexibility
- Insufficient staffing resources of the right skill levels (at all levels in West London)
- Insufficient reasonably priced quality housing of all sizes

Necessary investments

- Improve public transport, especially orbital links, and ease traffic congestion
- Upgrade national and international transport links (i.e. Heathrow runway three and high-speed rail)
- Invest in skills and education at all levels
- Support business start ups and high growth
- Invest in Outer London inward investment and business retention services
- Improve housing supply at all sizes

4) Which of the current employment sectors in Outer London will be thriving in 2031 and will any new sectors have emerged by then? Should we be actively encouraging particular sectors or focusing more on barriers that could be holding back growth in Outer London?

Current sectors likely surviving in 2031 – Food, Creative Industries, IT, Transport and Distribution, Pharmaceuticals, Health Care, and Education.

New sectors emerging – Tourism, Web-based entertainment, environmental technology, bio-technology/medicine/support.

Better to focus on creating a business friendly environment, both hard infrastructure (transport, accommodation) and soft (education, skills, networking, supply chains, information etc). Positive support should come in the form of strategic planning to encourage inward investment, start-up and additional investment in sectors with growth potential. Financing access support also.

5) The Commission's 'First Thoughts' paper outlines some ideas on the form 'super-hubs' might take and possible locations. Do you consider the development of 4 or 5 super-hubs in Outer London would enhance the Outer London's overall employment growth potential? What form do you think they might take? What role could mixed use development have there?

The 'super-hub' concept has manifest application and validity in some parts of London (i.e. Croydon for South London) where a single business/employment area is obvious. It is more difficult to see how it applies to West London, with its geographic diversity of economic activity. In West London there are a number of possible contenders – Hayes/Southall/Heathrow, Park Royal, the Golden Mile, White City/BBC – as well as important town centres like Uxbridge, Ealing and Hammersmith.

Where applied, super hubs should be based on areas with established economic and transport foundations, which can be further developed. It will be important that investment is planned in such a way that it benefits the entire area (i.e. through employment opportunities and good transport links). We think it is essential that the mixed use model be applied, combining commercial, residential and cultural leisure facilities, as well as, effective transport connections.

6) Which super-hub locations would you consider best meet the aim to improve Outer London's economic performance and why? What can be done to ensure that the super hubs are sufficiently attractive to business that businesses would want to base their operations there? What is required to ensure that a sufficient employment base is created for a super hub; in particular, could growth be achievable with or without infrastructure improvements (specify the infrastructure improvements needed)?

For West London, with its diverse economic geography, it is very difficult to identify areas for the super-hub form of investment. Other models still need consideration and may be more appropriate. Should the Commission conclude that the super-hub approach is relevant to West London, potential contenders for closer analysis are:

The White City/BBC/Park Royal area. This area has an established business base, existing transport connections, adjacent workforces and room for development. This area can be made more attractive with measures outlined in answers to 3) and 4). Infrastructure improvements will be critical, especially relating to modernising transport access, communications, and civic amenities.

The Hayes/Southall area. Hayes has a long history as an employment location being the former base for major employers. Hayes has good road and rail transport links and sits in the middle of the Heathrow economic area between the airport and Stockley Park. Also, it will become better connected as a result of the forthcoming Crossrail station development. Southall is the largest Asian shopping centre in Europe, and the Southall Gas Works site has 90 acres of brown-field land. The Hayes/Southall area is an identified Opportunity Area in the London Plan and requires some focus and investment to realise its potential.

7) If super-hubs are created, what role would you envisage for other town centres and other business locations/hubs (e.g. Park Royal) in Outer London and how can those roles be enhanced alongside the creation of super-hubs?

Other town centres and business locations need to be linked in to the super-hub through better transport and communications, as well as supply chain, promotional and networking structures. The need is to provide for mobility of labour. This approach will require a more flexible and visionary master planning approach for the whole sub-region.

8) What do you consider would be the optimal balance of employment opportunity for outer London between local opportunities, those in Central or Inner London, or those outside London in nearby growth corridors? What are the implications for those areas?

The objective is to shift the focus of public policy and investment out of Central London, to make sure a more “polycentric” policy can benefit the city as a whole and diversify employment opportunities and business attractions. We would suggest that the target should be a 50/50 balance between central and west London. This will benefit west London areas by creating more jobs and prosperity in our area, cool down an overheated centre, reduce commuter pressures, and bring environmental and life style benefits.

(B) Quality of Life

9) In absolute and relative terms (compared with Central and Inner London and the South East) how has the residential environment changed (good or bad) in Outer London over the last 25 years and how has this affected its attractiveness as a place to live, work and do business?

In absolute terms the environment in West London has deteriorated because of traffic congestion, under-invested town centres and lack of quality family housing stock. Some West London town centres have lost a sense of community and cultural identity, due to our transient population (40% move on from the area). There is also a perception that education provision is not of sufficient quality. Relative to Inner London (and the East) it has remained attractive and green, but compared to the South East region in general has not retained any advantages as a place to live. As a place for business it has lost relative advantages over both Inner London and the Thames Valley because of lack of investment in transport, housing and property.

10) What improvements would bring about the greatest improvements to the quality of life for outer London residents, workers and businesses? How would these bear on the economic objectives of the Commission?

- Improve public transport, especially internal to West London – both North-South or “hub and spoke” into town centres.
- More flexible planning procedures, allowing faster and more varied mixed-use development
- Improve quality housing stock, particularly family category
- Invest in public realm and spaces
- Enhance public safety through effective crime prevention measures

11) How could super hubs affect the quality of life in Outer London for residents, workers and businesses?

Better housing, transport, education, health and leisure amenities for residents.
More job opportunities, better work premises and transport for workers.
Improved transport connections to market, access to workforce, communications, clustering and networking for businesses.
The challenge is how to ensure that the benefits are enjoyed throughout the whole region, guaranteeing that no locality is left behind.

12) How important is the provision of local social infrastructure to the quality of living in Outer London? (schools, health or other specific infrastructure). How does this bear on the economic objectives of the Commission?

All are important, along with sports and leisure facilities and low levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. But underpinning the quality of life are the chances to be educated, to learn skills and develop reasonably paid careers. Hence, there is a need to promote business investment and growth to create job opportunities. The Commission needs to enlist the support of Government and boroughs in this.

13) What are the factors that give your or other districts in Outer London a sense of place and community ownership? How will these bear on the economic objectives of the Commission?

- Cultural identity
- History and town centres
- Public places and buildings that provide focus
- Established businesses or business areas
- Active community leadership on crime and anti-social behaviour
- Good schools and hospitals, and leisure facilities

By injecting investment into sensible infrastructure and business development, the Commission can make the hubs attractive to business and therefore create work and jobs and therefore greater well-being and cohesion. For super-hubs to be sustainable, they need to build community identities that attract long term residents and workforce commitment.

14) What improvements would you like to see in the quality of the public realm eg open space quality and provision? How will these bear on the economic objectives of the Commission?

This should always be integral to town centre, business area, and residential planning. The public realm provision must be central to all mixed use developments, providing a community heart and humanising developments to

make them longer lasting and durable. The public realm must be attractive, secure and safe for residents and workforce.

C) Transport

15) How would you make the super-hubs you have indicated more generally accessible to residents and workers from across London and outside? What is an acceptable balance between public transport and provision for cars? Will this vary in different parts of Outer London (e.g. in the Thames Gateway relative to West London?)

- West London Business subscribes to the recommendations of the West London 10 Point Travel Strategy.
- Better public transport is the key to improving movement around West London and lessening the traffic congestion. Either with buses in the short run, or a Metro concept in the longer term.
- Hubs would need special bus, cycling and walking policies applied.
- For cycling and walking policies to work, attention must be given to security and safety (cycle lanes and well designed public spaces)

The balance in West London needs tilting to a more effective public transport system, because the road system cannot be radically expanded. A desirable target would be zero growth in private cars and a 50/50 usage of public and private transport. Parking regulations also need to be loosened up to encourage new development.

16) What approach should be taken to traffic management including car parking, congestion and pollution and the bearing these have on climate change? How could this bear specifically on super-hubs, and more generally across Outer London if employment growth rose above historical trends and travel patterns changed as Outer London became a more attractive place to work?

- It must be remembered that West London is a car-borne economy
- Travel planning, including schemes like car-sharing, must be encouraged and promoted.
- Express bus services between town centres will help reduce congestion
- Pollution should be dealt with by longer term financial incentives towards greener vehicles (electric?)
- Super-hubs can play a role by employing pedestrianisation, green public transport systems, and encouragement of safe cycling and walking.
- Creating a range of suitable housing of varying size near to employment areas will also cut the need to travel.

17) Where traffic demand exceeds capacity in Outer London, what tools would be most effective for smoothing traffic around town centres (and managing crowding) in addition to or where there is not scope for infrastructure improvements?

- Improved public transport alternatives
- Public transport can be promoted by schemes such as park and ride, and free travel zone incentives

18) Extensive radial public transport networks already exist in town centres and some super-hubs. What needs to change to make them the modes of choice?

Greater regularity, punctuality, cleanliness, security and customer service (clarity of information) are needed. Interchanges between rail and bus need improving. These improvements need to be coupled with measure to deter car users from going into town centres – but they need viable alternatives.

19) The development of super-hubs is likely to require public transport improvements to make them more accessible. That in turn is likely to need residential densities to be optimised around and within the super-hubs to justify the necessary transport investment. Is this trade-off acceptable to secure better public transport access and employment growth and is there a particular, economically viable, balance to be struck between residential intensification, transport investment and employment growth?

The trade-off is acceptable and necessary. The “clustering” of businesses, and the offer of a broader range of quality housing will be an attraction to further investment, but that requires easy access for the workforce either through proximity (preferable) or better transport. The balance needs to be calculated by looking at potential demand for transport services. Ideally, the answer is greater opportunity for bussing, walking and cycling, and less need for other transport, the better. The more convenient we can make it for businesses to access the workforce, their markets, and their suppliers, the more jobs and employment we can create.

20) Do super-hubs need to evolve into 'hub and spoke' networks serving the neighbouring areas to make the most of opportunities for local residents? How could a hub and spoke network service the more geographically extensive labour markets required to support super-hubs (and provide accessible opportunities to more workers within and outside London)? If these networks are road based systems, should options for further demand management be considered?

The real problem in West London regarding wider access to a broader area, and links between town centres is the lack of radial transport hubs, which could link the radial public transport road and rail links. Provision of better public transport alternatives should parallel further traffic demand management measures.

21) More generally, what are the key destinations/services which people in Outer London want access to?

Heathrow, Park Royal, White City, town centres such as Uxbridge, Harrow, Wembley, Hounslow, Ealing, Hammersmith. Business centres such as Stockley Park, Bedfont Lakes, Hyde Park Hayes and Chiswick Park.

People aim to access work, education and health facilities, shopping (Westfield), leisure facilities and sport centres (Wembley, Chelsea FC).

22) How important is the provision of local transport infrastructure to the quality of living in outer London? How does this bear on the economy of outer London?

This is critical for a successful economy and therefore jobs and quality of life. This is about access to commercial premises and access to community centres.

West London Business