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SUCCEED MORE
THAN OTHERS? →

THE  TIMES

Boost transport links or lose the recovery, says CBI



The CBI wants the Government to do more to develop the nation's railway links Times photographer, Ben Gurr

Miles Costello

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Government dithering over crucial infrastructure investment risks undermining Britain's fragile economic recovery, says the CBI.

In a survey of business leaders carried out with KPMG, the confederation today tells the Government to do more to develop the nation's railway links, roads and airports, and to move faster to tie up projects and spending plans.

John Cridland, the CBI's director-general, said transport and energy should be immediate priorities.

The Energy Bill, which would enshrine the tariffs and returns needed to secure private-sector money for wind-farm and nuclear projects, must go straight on to the statute books, with secondary legislation brought forward, he said.

Business also wanted a clear strategy about the development of a high-speed digital network for e-commerce, Mr Cridland said.

The CBI/KPMG survey of 526 business leaders found that 65 per cent believed that government policy on infrastructure would have no impact and could even be detrimental.

Dissatisfaction with domestic transport links was rife, with 43 per cent expecting local roads to deteriorate and 26 per cent predicting that motorways would worsen in the next five years. Almost 31 per cent expected airport links to emerging overseas markets to deteriorate by 2018.

The Government has unveiled a £325 billion National Infrastructure Plan to kickstart economic growth, much of it backed by private sector funds. It fast-tracked 40 projects worth £100 billion to develop by 2020, including the Mersey Gateway Bridge in Liverpool, but has been criticised for failing to prioritise properly and provide enough detail.

Mr Cridland reaffirmed the CBI's backing for the HS2 rail link between London and Birmingham, and threw his weight behind a programme to widen a section of the A14 between Cambridge and Huntingdon that could create Britain's first new toll road in a decade.

He also said improvements to roads and rail links to airports in the South East and Birmingham were urgently needed, and that a third runway at Heathrow needed "to be an option". In the long term, the creation of a new airport hub in the South East capable of dealing with transfer traffic had to be tackled, he said.

The Treasury pointed out that the CBI/KPMG report said that, if delivered, its infrastructure investment plans would make a "significant difference". A spokesman said: "The Government's focus is now on implementing these plans."

- Britain is not making much headway in its attempts to rebuild itself as an industrial powerhouse, engineering and manufacturing bosses will say today (Robert Lea writes).

Twelve months on from its study of competitiveness, the manufacturers' organisation EEF has found that the economy still needs a clear government industrial policy.

Terry Scuoler, the EEF's chief executive, said: "We're seeing more signs that the growth engine is up and running, but we still need clarity of where we are driving."

The EEF's update on its report *The Route to Growth* found there has been little improvement in the contribution of investment or net trade to growth in the UK.

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