

Rail Corridor Strategy

Rail has a critical role in supporting planned housing and employment growth and there are significant opportunities to develop and enhance the rail offer with additional capacity and much improved connectivity between our major employment hubs, including new stations which would provide a step change in rail travel options. All of this can facilitate the significant modal shift which is going to be required to help meet the Climate Emergency agenda.

The Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study (ORCS) is being funded and progressed as a partnership between the Department for Transport and local / rail industry Stakeholders, including the Oxfordshire Growth Board and covers passenger and freight operations. The first stage of work has been completed and comprised:

- An overall strategic study of the rail network focusing on central Oxfordshire rail system **capacity** and **connectivity** requirements to best support economic growth in Oxfordshire.
- A specific study looking at the engineering feasibility / rail infrastructure requirement for re-opening the Cowley branch line.

What will the ORCS do?

- Establish the priorities for rail investment in Oxfordshire
- Demonstrate how prioritised rail investment can support the economy and development in Oxfordshire
- Ensure that the opportunities and benefits of proposed national rail investment (in particular East West Rail) can be secured

Whilst the study has not identified in detail specific solutions or projects for investment, it has identified parts of the network which will require enhancement, based on a proposed level of enhanced train service. This will ultimately depend on affordability and value for money and need to be deliverable and fundable.

These requirements can be met in several ways: additional capacity, new services, more frequent services, removing the need to change trains or altered stopping patterns. Further stages of the study will look at these in more detail, to enable new projects or programmes to be considered for entry into the national Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline.

For passenger services, the study examined and set out an evidence base for how planned growth would lead to enhanced rail provision, in two main ways:

- Increased **Capacity** requirements, in the form of additional carriages.
- Better **Connectivity** between key rail hubs, using the measure of generalised journey time, a combination of on-board journey time, waiting time and any time change trains. Focused on seven growth hubs requiring better connections: Banbury, Bicester, Culham, Didcot, Hanborough, Oxford and Oxford Parkway

Capacity

- Significant additional capacity is required to relieve congestion on services north and south of Oxford with some additional capacity needed by 2024, and more services required by 2028, plus additional capacity on the local Oxford-Didcot corridor from 2028.
- East West Rail Phase 2 (Oxford to Bedford and Milton Keynes) will significantly increase demand at key stations, such as Bicester Village, Oxford Parkway and Oxford, but there is sufficient capacity to meet forecast east-west demand on this corridor assuming this service comes into operation. There is also a requirement for additional capacity on existing services in and out of London Marylebone

Connectivity. This was the most significant finding of the study work, as:

- The Study identified the need for around 20 priority connections within Oxfordshire to be improved.
- Particularly notable is the need for much better connectivity for trips through Oxford linking main growth areas or hubs as set out in the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy, for example on the Didcot-Oxford-Bicester 'Knowledge Spine', both for end-to-end journeys and between intermediate stations at Culham and Oxford Parkway.

New stations. The conclusions at this stage are:

- The two stations on the Cowley branch line have the strongest justification, mainly as they are close to proposed nearby housing allocations.
- A station at Grove/Wantage could also be justified by 2028 on the basis of the new housing currently being built or being planned for in the area and emerging proposals for further employment growth.
- A potential station at Begbroke is included in 2033 scenario to support the development of a Global Innovation Campus with significant employment growth alongside planned housing growth.

Cowley Branch Line. Network Rail have completed the outline definition study for re-introducing passenger services on the line. The main conclusions are:

- It is feasible in engineering and operational terms to restore services on the line itself, but a reliable train service cannot be achieved without capacity enhancement on the main line through Oxford down to Kennington junction, which is over and above enhancements currently committed
- Subject to this, track improvement works on the branch would mean a doubling of line speed to 50mph and journey times of less than 10 minutes to/from Oxford, with services proposed to extend to other destinations

More detailed analysis of the main rail corridor between Oxford and Didcot is the priority for the next stage of work, as this is fundamental to the rest of the rail network through Oxfordshire. There is a clear need to understand the likely scope, scale and cost of the interventions that would be required on this corridor to run new services. Alongside this, similar work will look at the corridor between Didcot and Swindon.

North Cotswold Line

Alongside the ORCS work, further development of the proposals to increase capacity and rail services on this line, including more frequent services from Hanborough as a main rail hub, are being progressed by the North Cotswold Line Task Force.

Question 10

Rail Corridor Study - What do you think?

If capacity and connectivity were improved, how much more could you use the rail network in Oxfordshire?

To respond please use the online consultation form.