

**Divisions Affected – All**

## **Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**12 November 2025**

### **OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail**

**Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. **The Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee is REQUESTED to:**
  - (a) To note the draft OxRail 2040: Plan for Rail (the Plan) due for consideration by Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2025
  - (b) To make any comments and recommendations for consideration by Cabinet

#### **Executive Summary**

2. The purpose of this paper is to seek the views and recommendations of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the OxRail 2040: Plan for Rail (the Plan), as given in Annex 1, prior to consideration by Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> November.
3. An Executive Summary of the Plan is in Annex 2.
4. The Plan sets out Oxfordshire County Council's bold and ambitious plan to improve rail transport and connectivity across the County over the next 15 years. It has been developed over the last year in engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including the rail industry. It has also been subject to a full public consultation which has helped shape the final plan.
5. The requirement to publish a new 'rail strategy' is set out in Policy 21 of the Council's statutory Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP).
6. The Plan is a daughter document of the Council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP), adopted in July 2022. It is a statutory requirement of the Transport Act 2000 that local authorities must develop local transport plans. The Plan will sit under the LTCP and alongside several other Council policies and strategies relating to transport including Mobility hubs, Freight and Logistics, Bus and Movement and Place strategies.

## Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee consideration

7. The Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee were presented an update on development of OxRail 2040 on 23 April 2025. The Committee had two recommendations, and the response to these recommendations were published at the Cabinet on 15 July 2025. Comments and recommendations from the meeting on 12 November 2025 will be reported to Cabinet.

### Background

8. Oxfordshire is home to around 725,000 people, over 430,000 jobs, and a £24 billion economy, including vibrant research and innovation centres like the University of Oxford, Harwell, and Culham. An anchor of the Oxford–Cambridge Arc, the county is experiencing extensive housing, business, and infrastructure growth, which requires rail improvements to support regional connectivity, economic vibrancy, and environmental sustainability.
9. The Oxfordshire Rail Plan 2040 (OxRAIL 2040) was developed in response to the county's rapid economic growth, increasing population, and the need for a modern, sustainable transport system. The county's strategic location within the Oxford–Cambridge Arc and its dynamic mix of rural and urban communities have created both opportunities and challenges for transport connectivity, making rail a critical component of future mobility.
10. OxRAIL 2040 was developed by the Council as a long-term, county-wide rail plan designed to align with the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP), and setting an ambitious vision for modernising the network by 2040. It was launched for consultation in September 2025, inviting feedback through surveys and review of technical documents, as well as a number of stakeholder briefings, with the intention of shaping the county's rail system over the next 15 years.
11. The Plan outlines a forward-looking vision positioning rail as the backbone of a sustainable, accessible, and integrated transport network across Oxfordshire. It is built around three central pillars:
  - (a) Connectivity & Infrastructure – Enhancing track capacity, introducing new lines and stations, and improving operational services
  - (b) Climate Action – Electrifying routes, reducing carbon emissions, and encouraging modal shift from cars to rail
  - (c) Rail as Place shaper – Anchoring inclusive growth and community integration through transit-oriented development
12. The Plan's vision is for our railway to be a central part of a world-class integrated, accessible and sustainable transport system that enables all parts of the county to thrive and:
  - (a) Ensures that Oxfordshire retains its position of significance within our regional and national economy

- (b) Enables significant growth and development, supporting new housing and job creation
  - (c) Ensures that Oxfordshire's growing communities can fully participate in our economy and in society
  - (d) Contributes to the protection and enhancement of our natural and historic environment.
13. The Council is committed to leading the delivery of this vision by deploying its resources, expertise and policy levers. For example, at its meeting on 21 October 2026, Cabinet approved a conditional allocation of up to £10m from the retained funding for Enterprise Zone 1 (Science Vale) to enable the delivery of priorities arising from the Plan.
14. However, delivery cannot be achieved by the Council alone. Success will depend on Government, the rail industry and our local communities collaborating with us and playing their part.
15. The Plan also recognises the imminent and on-going changes in the structures of both local government, including the potential for devolution, and in the rail industry, and the opportunities and challenges this may create.
16. Developing a detailed, bold and ambitious rail plan is critical to establishing clear priorities and guiding future development of Oxfordshire's rail network. Implementation of the rail plan will help to improve capacity and connectivity between key settlements and our major employment hubs, providing a step-change and increasing travel options and accessibility.
17. The rail plan has a key focus on freight with firm proposals for additional infrastructure, electrification and the provision of appropriate freight terminals which will support the removal of substantial number of lorries from our congested highways network (notably the A34).
18. Officers commissioned specialist support from WSP to provide additional capacity, industry and Government credibility and appropriate external challenge with detailed work commencing in early-summer.
19. The Plan proposes a wide range of interventions, all of which are important to helping deliver a sustainable future for Oxfordshire. At the heart of this are four priorities that are critical to achieving the overarching OxRail 2040 vision of a modern, inclusive and sustainable railway. These priorities are set out below:
- (a) Oxford railway station – increasing capacity to support more services across the County and redeveloping it into a landmark station/integrated mobility hub and National gateway
  - (b) The Electrified Railway – building a zero-carbon network for Oxfordshire, anchored by the 'Electric Freight Spine' (25kV AC overhead wiring from Didcot Parkway on the GWML to Bletchley/Milton Keynes on the WCML)
  - (c) The Oxfordshire Metro – creating an integrated transport network that brings together rail, bus, walking and cycling in a better co-ordinated and seamless user-centred travel proposition. Early work will include

- progressing multi-modal ticketing, enhanced travel planning information and better timetable co-ordination
- (d) Proposed new stations to support growth – five new stations are proposed – at Oxford Cowley, Oxford Littlemore, Begbroke, Wantage & Grove and Ardley.
20. Additional opportunities are also explored, including developing an Oxfordshire Stations Action plan to identify improvements (including sustainable transport links), continuing to support community rail initiatives, and the need for a mass rapid transit option for the Oxford-Witney-Carterton corridor consistent with the emerging local plans for growth.
21. Together, these priorities reflect the rail plan's overarching themes of connectivity, climate action and place shaping - focusing investment and partnership working where it will make the biggest difference - for Oxfordshire's people, economy and environment while other elements of the Plan remain vital supporting components to ensure a balanced and connected network.

### **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

22. The plan is closely aligned with Oxfordshire's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP), in particular the vision which seeks to make Oxfordshire: *“an inclusive and safe net zero Oxfordshire transport system that enables all parts of the county to thrive. It will tackle inequality, be better for health, wellbeing and social inclusivity, and have zero road fatalities or serious injuries. It will also enhance our natural and historic environment and enable the county to be one of the world's leading innovation economies. Our plan sets out to achieve this by reducing the need to travel and private car use through making walking, cycling and public and shared transport the natural first choice.”*
23. OxRAIL 2040 aims to position rail as the backbone of this system, supporting new housing and jobs, improving quality of life, and driving nationally significant economic growth. The plan recognises the need to adapt to ongoing changes in local government and the rail industry, ensuring that Oxfordshire remains competitive and resilient in the face of future challenges.
24. The plan proposes a range of interventions, including new stations, electrification of lines, expansion of Oxford Station, and the development of an integrated “Oxfordshire Metro” network. These initiatives are designed to reduce carbon emissions, support sustainable travel choices, and ensure that rail services meet the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.
25. The new Council's strategic plan, 2025-2028 was approved by Council Cabinet on 21 October and by Full Council on 4 November. This sets out proposals to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county. The rail plan is most relevant to the ‘Fairer and Greener Oxfordshire themes, with the strategic plan highlighting the importance of continuing to roll out delivery of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. In addition, the following project reference is specifically noted on page 9:

*“Together with transport partners, we will work towards a countywide integrated rail and bus offer, including better connectivity and combined timetables and ticketing. To support this, we will produce a new rail plan by November 2025 and develop business cases for new stations and services, including Begbroke and Wantage & Grove by 2027”.*

26. Production of the Rail Plan and its priorities for developing plans for rail investment is therefore directly related to the new Council Strategic Plan.

### **Financial Implications**

27. Like many long-term transport plans, OxRAIL 2040 provides a framework for investment and development, identifying key projects and interventions that the Council and its partners will seek to deliver over time.
28. The Plan is not a fully funded programme at this stage. It is intended to guide future funding bids, partnership working and engagement with Government, the rail industry and other key stakeholders.
29. Cabinet on 21 October 2025 approved the conditional release of £10m of Enterprise Zone funding to fund initial priorities in the Plan such as rail-related business cases.
30. Many of the schemes outlined in the Plan will require conventional funding from central Government but a large proportion could be financed privately working with partners and investors that benefit from strong connectivity.
31. In parallel, the Council will explore new models to develop a funding and investment pipeline to support the delivery of the Plan.
32. Officers have led on the production of the rail plan with input from a range of colleagues from across the Council and specialist consultancy support and advice. Budget provision for Council staff is contained within the 2025-2026 placeshaping service allocation. Funding of specialist support providing technical input to the rail strategy and input to the public consultation exercise and its reporting is contained within the 2025-2026 Rail Development budget.

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(Finance)

### **Legal Implications**

33. The Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) is the Council's statutory Local Transport Plan and is a statutory document required under the Transport Act 2000. It was adopted by the Council in July 2022. The requirement to publish a new rail strategy is set out in Policy 21 of the LTCP.

34. OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail (the Plan) will be a supporting document to the (LTCP) and satisfies the requirement of its Policy 21.
35. Whilst there is a statutory requirement for the county's Local Transport Plan to be consulted upon, there is no such requirement for the subsequent strategies to be consulted upon.
36. The consultation that has been undertaken on the Plan is not intended to constitute a statutory or other necessary consultation that is required or is otherwise carried out at a time that any of the actions in this report or in the Plan are proposed to be implemented.

Comments checked by: Jennifer Crouch, Principal Solicitor (Environmental)  
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### **Staff Implications**

37. The delivery of the plan requires resources and the Council's investment in staff will ensure the key elements and priorities can be delivered in the timeframes. As set out above, the Council's Cabinet conditionally approved £10million of Enterprise Zone funding to progress initial priorities funding of rail plan priorities on 21 October 2025. A more detailed programme will be developed to set out how this funding will be spent. However, it's expected to include funding staffing resource at the Council needed to sponsor development of rail plan projects such as new stations. This will be reviewed alongside the upcoming transformation and staff re-structure process for the Place Planning Service.

### **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

38. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken (see Annex 3) to ensure that equalities implications of the Plan have been assessed in a fair and thorough manner. This shows that delivery of the Plan will make a significantly positive contribution to delivering the Council's equalities-related priorities, particularly tackling inequalities in Oxfordshire and investing in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network.
39. The Plan's key proposals and interventions that will reduce transport-related inequality include:
  - (a) Improving access to and at railway stations for those with disabilities, both visible and non-visible
  - (b) Working with, and supporting groups such as the Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership and schools in build understanding and confidence in how to travel by rail, particularly for the young and disadvantaged groups
  - (c) Working with and supporting the rail industry in the design and procurement of new and much more accessible rolling stock
  - (d) Engaging with people with lived experience of disabled travel to ensure equality and diversity issues are appropriately considered – an example

of this is our engagement with the Oxfordshire IMPACT group and the Oxfordshire Citizens' Assembly during the public consultation into the Plan

- (e) Establishing an Oxfordshire Rail Station Accessibility Requirements Document to support those developing and designing proposals for our stations

40. The full impact of each detailed proposal will need to be understood and assessed during the development of detailed business cases. Connectivity and accessibility to and from and around any new stations will be key, as will the potential impact on local residents of new infrastructure, or changes to existing infrastructure serving non-rail users, such as bridges and level-crossings.

### **Sustainability Implications**

41. A Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) has been completed and is at Annex 4. It demonstrates that delivery of the Plan will make a significantly positive contribution to the Council's actions to tackle climate change and its LTCP target to achieve a net-zero transport network by 2040.
42. The Plan's key proposals and interventions that will reduce transport-related carbon emissions include:
- (a) Encouraging switch from motor vehicles travel to lower emissions and energy efficient travel
  - (b) Cleaner energy production at stations.
  - (c) Working with our partners to analyse the opportunities and technical integration of renewable energy on rail in Oxfordshire.
  - (d) Reducing need for private car ownership/use by proposing an integrated transport network through its Oxfordshire metro concept
  - (e) Expanding the electrification of the Oxfordshire's rail network and proposing modern, green trains that enable passenger trains and freight locomotives to be powered by sustainable electricity
  - (f) Ensuring that our infrastructure is resilient in a changing climate
  - (g) Harnessing and using renewable energy for our rail network and embedding nature first and circular economy principles.
  - (h) Striving in Oxfordshire to pursue a net-zero emissions value chain from our designers and suppliers ensuring that embodied carbon emissions are reduced and offset as far as possible
43. The Plan also recognises the need to improve biodiversity and protect the natural environment. It sets out that bio-diversity net-gain is a core requirement of all major infrastructure projects and an Oxfordshire Railway Bio-Diversity Net-Gain Requirements Document will be developed building on the forthcoming Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Bio-diversity Action Framework.

### **Risk Management**

44. Key risks identified in development of the rail plan included potential changes in national political priorities, varying levels of political support across Oxfordshire, lack of buy-in from local business and key partner agencies, competing visions making it difficult to develop rail services, difficulties in delivering interdependent projects and delays to key project milestones that could jeopardise when the rail plan is adopted. Risks were mitigated by:
- (a) Appointing specialist consultants to support the rail plan's development
  - (b) Engaging with key partners, stakeholders, politicians and Council colleagues/teams to inform the rail plan prior to public consultation to ensure broad support and alignment with other relevant plans, commitments, resources and aspirations
  - (c) Undertaking a four-week public consultation and programme of engagement to gather public feedback on the emerging plan and inform its refinement prior to finalisation and adoption
  - (d) Ensuring the final plan reflects the current and very latest emerging relevant plans and commitments that could affect the plan's content and deliverability
45. Looking forward, there will be need to review risks to delivery of the programme of priorities arising from the rail plan. This is expected to be undertaken in a programme and project risk registers. The following overall programme risks and mitigations have been identified:
- a. **Funding and finance:** Full plan delivery will require significant investment from both the public and private sectors to deliver in full. Oxfordshire is a good position to secure further funding, given confirmation of significant investment such as Oxford Station and Cowley Branch Line, and wider government commitments to invest in rail connectivity such as East West Rail. However, there is a continued commitment to work closely with the rail industry and other local and regional partners to make the case for further investment, such as new trains and stations. The initial £10 million identified from Enterprise Zone funding will put Oxfordshire on a solid grounding to further progress key required workstreams, such as developing the business cases for new stations.
  - b. **Devolution and local government reform:** There are currently proposals for devolution with the plans to set-up a new Mayoral Strategic Authority, as well as proposals for local government reform that would mean that the County Council would not exist in future. Whilst it is recognised that this gives some uncertainty to delivery of future phases of the plan, it would also give opportunities. For example, under plans for Rail Reform put forward by government, Mayoral Strategic Authorities would have a stronger say in how the rail network can be developed. It is also expected that Strategic Mayoral Authorities would take a wider strategic view of transport network development and investment opportunities. In addition, any new unitary local councils would have powers over transport and planning, helping to co-ordinate plans for development alongside transport investment.

## Consultations



46. The development of the Plan has involved extensive stakeholder engagement, public consultation, and collaboration with government, the rail industry, and local communities. The plan's priorities and proposals have been shaped by evidence-based analysis and feedback from a wide range of partners.
47. A substantial non-statutory public consultation for the rail plan was undertaken from 3 September to 1 October 2025 inclusive. This was run on the Council's 'Let's Talk Oxfordshire' consultation platform, and the majority (2,127) of responses were submitted through this portal. In addition, 444 responses were sent by e-mail, including from a wide range of stakeholders.
48. Extensive in-person and online engagement with internal and external parties was also carried out during the consultation period.
49. Consultation on the rail plan received much positive media coverage including articles in the Oxford Mail, specialist trade press and on BBC South Today.
50. The consultation generated 2,571 responses in total which is markedly more than recent public consultations by other authorities for comparable rail plans/strategies.
51. A report of the public consultation is in Annex 5. It summarises responses to the Let's Talk Oxfordshire online survey as well as key points raised in responses received by email.
52. Key summary headlines from the 2,127 responses received through the Let's Talk Oxfordshire online survey portal include:
  - (a) Overall, there was strong support for the proposals within the Rail Plan, with 93% of respondent's stating that they support or strongly support the plans. Further, 88% said that they would be encouraged to use rail with an improved service, and 94% said that co-ordinating rail, bus, cycling and pedestrian travel in Oxfordshire was important.
  - (b) There was a good level of response from across Oxfordshire, but with strongest engagement in Oxford, as well nearby towns including Witney, Carterton and Wantage. Other areas with a strong response rate included those where plans for rail improvements are expected, including Bicester, Didcot and Banbury.
  - (c) When asked about why they supported the Plan, many respondents stated support for the role of rail improvements in reducing car use, the environmental benefits of rail, as well as how it can support growth and development across Oxfordshire. Strong support was also given for new stations.
  - (d) A number of challenges were also flagged by respondents, including questions over how rail improvements can be financed and delivered, the limited geographical scope of the rail network across parts of Oxfordshire, as well as need for frequent services at different times of day.

53. In addition to the Let's Talk Oxfordshire responses, 444 responses were received by e-mail of which 389 focused on emphasising support for a new rail service between Oxford and Witney/ Carterton. The majority of these 389 responses were based on a standard template. The remainder of e-mail responses were from individuals or organisations, including other local authorities, a number of parish and town councils, the Universities and those from the rail industry. All organisations who responded are listed in the consultation report at Annex 3.
54. As with individual responses, there was a range of points made by organisations, including:
- (a) Support for new stations, but a need to ensure that these stations had adequate train service frequencies
  - (b) Support for the role of rail freight in helping support economic growth and reduce the impacts of road-based freight movements
  - (c) Support for ensuring that rail integrates with other modes of transport, particularly active travel and bus services
  - (d) Ensuring that improvements for rail in Oxfordshire tie with wider regional connectivity improvements, such as links via East West Rail, and links to Heathrow
  - (e) Support for electrification and infrastructure and rolling stock improvements
  - (f) Support for better integrated ticketing
  - (g) Concern that rail services can provide good connectivity and frequency of services for all, including those in more rural areas
55. The responses were reviewed in detail from the consultation, and whilst there was significant support for the OxRail 2040 vision and priorities, it is noted there are some key matters raised, and an explanation is needed on how they are reflected in the updated plan.
56. **Carterton-Witney-Oxford public transport improvements:** There was significant strength of feeling on the need to improve public transport links to West Oxfordshire fed back in the consultation is recognised, including the aspirations for a Carterton-Witney-Oxford rail link. In the first instance, the recommended best approach to this is to undertake a more detailed study to review mass rapid transit options for the A40 corridor, incorporating work done to date. This will include taking into account the emerging growth locations identified in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan and linkages to key employment sites such as Brize Norton. This approach is reflected in the updated Rail Plan, and work will develop at pace alongside stakeholders in West Oxfordshire. In addition, there is a recognition of the need to strengthen rail connections along the North Cotswold Line, with additional services now identified in the Plan's concept future train service plan, including 3 trains per hour to serve the Hanborough station mobility hub.
57. **Train service frequencies and specification:** There was significant support in the consultation responses for the proposed new stations identified, but there

were some queries regarding the frequency of the proposed train services for these stations. The proposed future train service specification has been reviewed and increases in frequency of services are planned at the proposed Wantage and Grove and Ardley stations. A summary table of proposed future services in the report, as well as a summary of existing and proposed train service frequencies between key stations.

58. **Regional and cross boundary matters:** There were very useful responses from wider regional partners, highlighting the importance of integration of Oxfordshire rail services with wider regional connections. In light of these comments, references to linkages and proposals have been strengthened for improvements along the North Cotswold Line, highlighted the importance of East West Rail and relevant partnerships along the OxCam Corridor, and recognised the aspirations for improvements at Reading station as well as onward linkages to Heathrow through the proposed Heathrow Western Rail Link.
59. **Freight considerations:** Recognising the responses from the Rail Freight industry, promotion of Rail Freight continues to be an important part of the updated Plan. Relevant sections have been updated for clarity on priorities for this important area, including how East West Rail can strengthen rail freight opportunities.
60. **The role of rail in delivering an integrated transport network:** There was clear support in the consultation feedback for better co-ordinating rail with other modes of transport to deliver a more co-ordinated transport network. The Plan sets out the concept of the Oxfordshire Metro concept to help deliver this, including ensuring effective integration with bus and active travel. It is recognised that significant work will be needed to enable key elements, such as more integrated ticketing, to be delivered. The Council are committed to continue to develop these wider plans in more detail with key partners such as public transport operators, as well as set out actions for improvements at specific stations across the network.
61. **Recent funding announcements:** Following the recent government announcement on funding, the plan text has been updated to make clear the current status of Cowley Branch Line development.
62. The range and extent of detailed comments received as part of the consultation has indicated that there is significant interest in and support for rail improvements across Oxfordshire. This feedback will also be critical in shaping more detailed work as the programme of improvement within the Rail Plan gets taken forward.
63. In addition to the public consultation, extensive engagement was held with local groups and stakeholders just prior to and throughout the consultation period. In total, the Council met with around 270 people over 19 engagement sessions. The events included:

- (a) Thames Valley Rail Future – An in-person event with 55 attendees including councillors, stakeholders and community representatives
- (b) Oxfordshire MPs – an online briefing event with all seven Oxfordshire MPs or their representatives
- (c) Active Travel Roundtable – an online event with 13 attendees from stakeholders with focus on active travel (walk/wheel/cycle) and its integration with rail travel
- (d) IMPACT (disability) group – an online event with nine attendees giving insight into the lived experience of travel from a disabled perspective
- (e) Oxfordshire Citizens' Assembly – an in-person event with 14 participants leading to several recommendations for the Plan
- (f) Oxford Colleges Growth Group – An online meeting with eight participants from Oxford Colleges Growth Group discussing the impact of rail connectivity on Oxford's academic institutions and their growth plans
- (g) Oxfordshire County Council locality meetings – A series of briefings with approximately 60 County Councillors
- (h) All-Member briefing – An online session with 11 Oxfordshire County Council members
- (i) Oxfordshire Developers Forum – An in-person session with 75 delegates including landowners, property developers and agents

64. In addition, the Oxfordshire Joint Leaders Committee was briefed on the Plan on 2<sup>nd</sup> October.

65. The full report of the Citizens' Assembly's meeting was prepared by Mutual Gain and is at Annex 7. Five of its six recommendations had support of over 90% (i.e. substantially higher than the 80% threshold used to indicate strong consensus) and are summarised as:

- (a) Creating an integrated network map combining rail, bus, cycling and walking routes
- (b) Establishing minimum connectivity and accessibility standards for all stations
- (c) Encouraging young people's independent use of rail to foster long-term sustainable travel habits
- (d) Ensuring a human presence at stations, supported by clear safety measures
- (e) Opening smaller stations for wider community use, such as local initiatives, volunteers and charities

66. A sixth recommendation calling for investment to prioritise a countywide public transport system over rail-specific funding, received lower support (30%).

67. The Plan includes actions in its Rail as Placeshaper chapter that fulfil each of the five Citizens' Assembly recommendations that exceeded the consensus threshold.

## **Robin Rogers, Director Economy and Place**

Annex:

1. OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail
2. OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail - Executive Summary
3. Equalities Impact Assessment
4. Climate Impact Assessment
5. Report on OxRail 2040: Plan for Rail consultation (by WSP)
6. Let's Talk Oxfordshire Survey Questions
7. Report on the recalled Oxfordshire Citizens' Assembly (by Mutual Gain)

Background papers: Nil

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