

PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 APRIL 2025

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL RAIL STRATEGY

Report by Director of Economy and Place

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Committee is RECOMMENDED to

- consider the report, raise any questions, and to **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet.

Executive Summary

2. The requirement to publish a new rail strategy is set out in Policy 21 of our Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP). The Council is producing the rail strategy in its role as statutory Local Transport Authority.
3. In view of this, the Council is developing the rail strategy to plan and coordinate the work required, help influence the allocation of Government funding, leverage private sector investment and ultimately deliver substantially increased passenger and freight services. Following public consultation it is envisaged that a new strategy will be completed in late 2025.
4. A slide deck is attached as Annex 1, which provides greater detail on this.

Background

5. Developing a detailed and ambitious rail strategy is critical to establishing clear priorities and guide future development of the network. Implementation of the rail strategy will help to improve capacity and connectivity between key settlements and our major employment hubs, providing a step-change in travel options and accessibility.
6. In order to provide capacity, industry and government credibility and external challenge, officers are in the process of commissioning specialist support to assist with delivering economic analysis, demand modelling, work on content, input to engagement/consultation and graphic design. This work will commence during May.
7. An initial draft vision, objectives and likely key projects associated with the strategy are set out in Annex 1 for early discussion, prior to the commencement of evidence gathering and analysis. The Committee may wish to bring the draft

strategy back for further detailed engagement at one or more points during the development.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

8. The rail strategy will contribute heavily towards a number of the Council's Strategic Priorities, particularly:

- Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work
- Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network
- Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit

9. The rail strategy will seek to support the Council's wider transport vision as set out in its Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, 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.”

Financial Implications

10. Staff (predominantly in the Council's National and Regional team) are leading on the production of the rail strategy with input from a range of colleagues from across the Council. Budget provision for Council staff is contained within the 2025-2026 placeshaping service allocation. Funding of specialist advice to provide technical input to the rail strategy is contained within the 2025-2026 Rail Development budget, which also funds the public consultation exercise and production.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

11. The Transport Act 2000 introduced a statutory requirement for local transport authorities such as Oxfordshire County Council to produce a Local Transport Plan (LTP). Amendments made by the Transport Act 2008 allowed local transport authorities to review the LTP, its strategies and delivery plans as it

sees fit. The requirement to publish a new rail strategy is set out in Policy 21 of our statutory Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP).

12. Oxfordshire County Council has a responsibility to consider how to use the Local Transport Planning framework in the way which works best for its area. Authorities are accountable to their communities rather than to the Department for Transport for both the quality of the transport strategies prepared and for ensuring effective delivery.
13. The Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee's remit, as determined in Part 6.1A (6) of the Council's Constitution, covers transport matters.

Comments checked by:

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Annex: Annex 1: OxRAIL 2040 Slide Deck

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

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