

Divisions Affected – All

CABINET 17 June 2025

– Rail Strategy Report of Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
 - a) Note the recommendations contained in the body of this report and to consider and determine its response to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and
 - b) Agree that, once Cabinet has responded, relevant officers will continue to provide each meeting of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a brief written update on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations for 12 months, or until they are completed (if earlier).

REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

3. At its meeting on 23 April 2025, the Committee considered a report updating it on the development of the Council's Rail Strategy, the requirement for which is set out in Policy 21 of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP).
4. The Committee was grateful to Cllr Judy Roberts, Cabinet member for Infrastructure and Development Strategy, and to Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place, Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways, Bryan Evans, Rail Project Manager, and Pete, Brunskill, Rail Development Lead, for attending to present the report.

SUMMARY

5. The Committee established that the Council is developing the Rail Strategy to plan and coordinate the work that will be 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.
6. The Committee received an initial draft vision, objectives, and likely key projects associated with the strategy for early discussion. This was prior to the commencement of evidence-gathering and analysis that will be undertaken by officers during the summer of 2025.
7. The Director of Economy and Place and the Rail Project Manager discussed key projects including Oxford Railway Station expansion, electrification, and new stations with the Committee. Members emphasised stakeholder collaboration, active travel integration, and funding strategies, highlighting the need for realistic and vision-led planning.
8. The Committee also discussed collaboration with stakeholders such as Begbroke Science Park and Oxford University Development and the Director confirmed that there was ongoing support and discussions with partners, and that connectivity with travel and bus routes remained a priority.
9. The Committee hoped that its new membership would scrutinise the draft Strategy once it was ready and makes two recommendations relating to its development – one relating to strategic planning and the other around finance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

10. The Committee welcomed the nascent strategy and was concerned that it should align with the ‘decide and provide’ or vision-led planning approach of the LTCP as opposed to the demand-led ‘predict and provide’. As set out in the LTCP on p100, the “decide and provide approach to transport planning decides on the preferred future and then provides the means to work towards that which can accommodate uncertainty. This offers the opportunity for more positive transport planning” in contrast to the traditional predict and provide approach which “uses past or historical traffic and socio-economic trends to determine the future” and which allows for “an increasing risk that infrastructure is provided that does not meet or shape the transport needs of the future.”¹

¹ <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/roads-and-transport-connecting-oxfordshire/LocalTransportandConnectivityPlan.pdf>, p100

11. This concern that it might not be vision-led arose from the timeline set out in the report which referred to there being “demand modelling and economic (GVA²) analysis” during June and July before the strategy was to be produced.
12. The Committee received assurances that the strategy would ultimately align with the vision-led approach but that there were early, more swiftly-deliverable elements that were linked to current demand. The earlier stages of the outworking of the strategy were necessarily therefore focused on a less visionary approach but one that would be able to feed into the regional-level planning that would be expected in a future new strategic authority. There was a need to make progress now, though.
13. The Committee recognised that there was clearly value in recognising current demand but that there should be greater attention to the regional- and strategic-level planning that would necessarily arise in the future, not least as a result of the Government’s encouragement of Spatial Development Strategies, through the Planning and Infrastructure Bill.
14. The Committee also recognised that there was uncertainty about the future but that, given the aim was for at least four new railway stations by 2040, significant swathes of the strategy and its action plan were some years ahead. It would therefore be appropriate to think ahead and to work back from the desired outcome, determining the steps that need to be taken to deliver the preferred future.
15. The Committee considered that it would be preferable for the timeline to explicitly reference vision-led planning for the long-term in the timeline for the project rather than for it to be implicitly understood. That would demonstrate the Council’s commitment to such in this sphere.
16. The Committee has previously moved a recommendation relating to the Government Office for Science’s The Futures Toolkit, to which Cabinet responded on 22 April 2025³ and continues to commend it to the Council. The Futures and Foresights⁴ approaches and toolkits available, including those of Mott McDonald⁵, would – the Committee posits – be of great value to the Council when approaching the draft strategy. They provide tools to deal with exactly the same sort of challenges the Council is facing in drawing up a long-term strategy. The Committee recommends that, in the Council’s modelling to devise the strategy, they take account of them.

Recommendation 1: That the Council should integrate the Futures-led Foresight approach into the Rail Strategy modelling, to ensure it aligns

² Gross Value Added measures the value generated in the production of goods and services and is one measure of overall economic performance. The Office of National Statistics summarises it as “the value generated by any unit engaged in the production of goods and services.”

³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossvalueaddedgva>

⁴ <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s75862/Place%20to%20Cabinet%20-%20response%20pro%20forma%20-%20IFS%20and%20s106%20Project%20Review%20002%20v2%20cd.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/futures-and-foresight>

⁵ <https://www.mottmac.com/en-gb/insights/topics/futures/>

with the approach of the LTCP and to ensure and enable long-term strategic planning.

17. There was a recognition that there would be funding challenges when it came to delivery of the Rail Strategy and that, without private-public finance, it would be difficult for the ambitions of the strategy to come to fruition. The Committee was heartened to hear of conversations with institutions and organisations eager to collaborate and a shared commitment to the success of the strategy. The Committee was hopeful that shared commitment might entail the contribution of funding.
18. The example of the funding of the Elizabeth Line in London was discussed in Committee. The Committee noted an article by the Chief Executive of London First which explained that 40% of the nearly £19 billion the Elizabeth Line cost “has been paid for by London’s businesses. This is not money that would have otherwise been spent in other ways, but new money on top of existing tax contributions.⁶” This was in addition to Government funding and Mayoral funding (including developer contributions and Crossrail Business Rate Supplement).
19. The Committee is clear that Council simply would not be able to finance the outworking of the Rail Strategy alone and will be dependent on innovative thinking, collaboration, and private-public funding. The Committee established that the Council had engaged specialist support on this issue and agreed that this would need exploring as part of the Council’s Commercial Strategy as well as the Rail Strategy.
20. Without there being a commitment to upskilling officers in how to deliver private-public finance on the scale needed, though, the Committee is concerned that the Council will be making its task harder. The Committee is, therefore, of the view that the Council should support private-public finance upskilling to make its ambitions achievable.
21. There is a wealth of literature available on how the Elizabeth Line came to be and how it was both financed and delivered⁷. The Committee considers that the Council should ensure that its lessons are heeded and applied when considering its own Rail Strategy.

Recommendation 2: That the Council should support private-public finance upskilling and apply lessons from the funding of the Elizabeth Line.

FURTHER CONSIDERATION

⁶ <https://www.onlondon.co.uk/john-dickie-london-has-paid-for-the-elizabeth-line-the-whole-country-is-already-benefiting-from-it/>

⁷ Readily accessible examples include the [House of Commons Briefing Paper \(CBP00876\) by Andrew Haylen ‘Crossrail \(Elizabeth Line\)’](#) and the [Crossrail Learning Legacy Website](#)

22. It will be for the 2025/2026 Committee members to decide whether or not to continue scrutinising the Rail Strategy but it is currently expected that they consider the draft strategy at their meeting on 24 September 2024.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

23. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power:
'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.
24. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2 (3) iv) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

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Annex:	Pro-forma Response Template
Background papers:	None
Other Documents:	None
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