

CABINET – 17 JANUARY 2012

DRAFT RAIL STRATEGY FOR OXFORDSHIRE TO 2034

Report by Deputy Director, Highways & Transport

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to set out the proposed Rail Strategy for Oxfordshire, to cover the period up to 2034 which includes the next four rail 'control periods' for investment. Subject to approval, stakeholder consultation on this Strategy will take place in February and March, with the final agreed version to be included in the Council's updated Local Transport Plan 3 in spring 2012.
2. Investment in rail will play a key role in supporting Oxfordshire's economic development. There are a number of transport corridors where traffic congestion is already a serious problem and where rail already provides (or could potentially provide) an efficient and sustainable alternative, as it has a number of important advantages for commuters, business travellers and the movement of goods. There is an opportunity for Rail to establish itself as part of the backbone of Oxfordshire's transport network, linking the key settlements in the Oxfordshire Growth Arc - Science Vale, Oxford and Bicester, offering a genuine alternative to the A34 and other strategic corridors for many journeys. **Annex 1** illustrates the potential of the railway to underpin future development in the County, notably the up to 30,000 new jobs and 20,000 new homes which are planned for the Growth Arc area alone over the next twenty years.
3. With significant economic growth and forecast increases in demand for travel, there has never been a more important time for Oxfordshire to develop a long term rail strategy and timing is crucial: the Great Western Rail Franchise, which provides the majority of services through Oxfordshire, is being re-let from May 2013 for a potential 15 year period. Decisions are also due over the coming months on rail investment priorities for the 2014 to 2019 'Control Period', with Government consultation on the 'High Level Output specification' (HLOS) for that period due to take place in July 2012. Therefore, it is important that the County Council gives a clear view on its priorities for investment in infrastructure and services over this period.

Background – Recent and Committed Rail Investment

4. There are 40% more passenger journeys and 60% more freight on the National rail network compared with 10 years ago. In Oxfordshire, there were nearly 13 million journeys travelling to/from the county in 2009-10, an increase of 41% in just seven years. The importance of strategic rail for Oxfordshire has increased markedly in recent months, with the completion of three projects:

- Redoubling of the Cotswold Line;
 - Southampton to West Midlands freight route gauge enhancement project, which will see a further 50,000 lorries per year taken off this route;
 - Delivery of Evergreen Mainline (Banbury-Bicester-London Marylebone)
5. There are also a number of very significant projects underway, which will totally reshape the railway through the County over the next five years. The principal ones are:
- **Chiltern Railways Evergreen 3:** connecting Oxford and Bicester (and on to London Marylebone) with a high speed, high frequency service upgraded Bicester Town Station and new 'Parkway' Station at the existing Water Eaton P&R site. Subject to final ministerial approval, this is expected to be operational from May 2014;
 - **East West Rail Stage 1:** A £270m investment that will further enhance the Bicester-Oxford corridor and extending it to Bedford/Milton Keynes and, crucially, down into Science Vale UK at Didcot and on to Reading, connecting all three areas of the Oxfordshire Growth Arc. This project has recently been included in the Government's draft HLOS for the 2014-2019 period, and is planned to be operational from 2017.
 - **Electrification and resignalling** of the Great Western main line between London Paddington, Didcot and Oxford, which is a committed £5 billion investment by Network Rail project due to be delivered by 2016. This will be accompanied by a £4.5 billion investment in a new high speed train fleet by 2017 (Inter City Express Programme) providing 100 new trains (600 carriages) some of which will replace the ageing diesel fleet on the Great Western line.

Rail Strategy Document - Overview

6. The strategy covers passenger and freight travel. The proposed **vision** for the strategy is: *"to develop a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient rail network that meets the access and mobility needs of residents, businesses and visitors; and supports the development of the county's economy."*
7. The specific **purposes** of the strategy include:
- Explaining how a safe, efficient and accessible rail network will help to deliver economic priorities for the county; in particular the creation of new jobs;
 - Presenting a coherent, evidence-based and realistic set of investments that the County Council (and its partners) would like the rail industry to help us plan and deliver;
 - Forming a key part of county and regional transport network by providing real choice of alternatives to road for passenger and freight movements.
8. There are two distinct parts to the Oxfordshire Rail Strategy. Part 1 covers policy and strategy, setting out Oxfordshire's approach to rail and its

importance in meeting wider economic, growth and other objectives. Part 2 is a Delivery Plan which shows, by route, what Oxfordshire (working in partnership with the rail industry) wants to see happen.

Rail Strategy Document – Part 1

9. **Part 1** of the document covers the following areas:
 - The Role of Transport and Rail in Economic Development;
 - Policies and standards for strategic aspirations to develop the rail network;
 - The baseline situation - where the rail network is now, including the increase in service frequency and connectivity that has taken place in the last few years and key challenges now and into the future;
 - Medium / Longer Term Rail Industry Investment Plans.
10. Strategic considerations and implications for the Council include:
 - Working closely with the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (and others) to highlight and promote rail projects which can stimulate and support growth;
 - Undertaking business case work with rail industry and other partners to establish which projects offer the best value for money;
 - Building up a prioritised, deliverable programme of proposed investment in rail projects over the next 20 years.

Rail Strategy Document – Part 2

11. Part 2 sets out our aspirations for rail in Oxfordshire taking a corridor by corridor approach. It outlines the Strategic Projects that are either planned or could be developed, both for Oxfordshire and proposals that would enhance the County's national (and international) rail connectivity, setting out the main issues that the Council and its partners will need to consider. These include:
 - **East West Rail** – finalising the business case, service patterns and funding package (including local contributions), work which is being led by the EWR Project Board;
 - **Evergreen 3** – working with Chiltern Rail to ensure the requirements of the Transport & Works Act are delivered, especially at key locations including the Water Eaton Park & Ride site and Bicester Town station;
 - **Oxford station** - resolving what will be the main operational constraint on the rail network in this area, once the works at Reading are completed. Work is

underway with partners to agree a longer term masterplan for the site whilst continuing to progress shorter term projects like the south bay platform.

- **Accessing Science Vale UK.** This includes the potential for Grove & Wantage station, linked to wider corridor approach from Bicester/Oxford via Grove/Wantage to Swindon/Bristol - a business case needs to clearly demonstrate how it would support growth and economic development. Also important is Culham station and access to the Science Centre and the further development of Didcot Parkway as a rail hub.
- **Electrification/the Intercity Express Programme (IEP):** scope and phasing, implications of a mixed fleet of electric / bi-mode trains for service patterns;
- **CrossRail and Western Access to Heathrow** - Rapid, reliable access to Heathrow is critical to Oxfordshire's economic success and Crossrail brings opportunities in terms of new connectivity with Gatwick.
- **High Speed 2** – considering Oxfordshire's response once a decision on its future is announced by Government, bearing in mind concerns about the business case and high cost of developing the proposal, and, should the project proceed, Oxfordshire's clear preference for the route consulted upon because it is shorter and has less impact on the county.
- **Other proposed strategic station projects** – these include upgrades at Banbury and Didcot Parkway.

12. Strategic considerations and implications for the Council include:

- Identification of key rail hubs, interchange points and developing a strategic, planned approach to the network – for example considering the role of Oxford station and access by different modes in relation to Parkway stations at Didcot and Water Eaton;
- Developing rail services and stations to link the main areas of the Oxfordshire Growth Arc, positioning passenger rail (as part of a wider high quality public transport network, including bus links) as a genuine alternative for car trips, especially on the A34 corridor;
- Facilitating rail freight enhancements, to promote better access for businesses and help reduce the pressure of lorries on the A34 – for example land at Graven Hill in Bicester to create a rail freight hub, and greater use of the Cowley branch line;
- Ensuring we maximise opportunities and outcomes for the rail network through the Great Western Franchise renewal and Network Rail investment planning.

Stakeholder Consultation and Engagement

13. Championing by and support from stakeholders for the major contribution that rail can play to Oxfordshire's growth agenda – especially in relation to the A34 corridor as a key enabler (but also barrier to) growth to Oxfordshire's three identified growth areas - will be crucial to realising Oxfordshire's ambitions. Close working with the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and other key stakeholders will be essential if our ambitions are to be realised.
14. There are also likely to be many different demands from customers. Longer distance passengers want services to be as fast as possible by minimising the number of stops. Local communities want to see more stops at their particular station – before having as fast a journey as possible thereafter. There is an increasing demand for freight traffic as the operational and environmental advantages of rail become more apparent to people who need to move their goods about. Balancing these demands will be a challenge.
15. To identify these, throughout the document are highlighted **key consultation questions** (identified throughout the document) which we would particularly value views on from anyone with an interest in the future development of the county's rail network. A six week consultation is proposed and is planned to be launched in early February 2012, using the Council's consultation portal.

Financial and Staff Implications

16. There are no direct financial or staff implications arising from this report. Strategy development and consultation will use existing, identified resources.

RECOMMENDATION

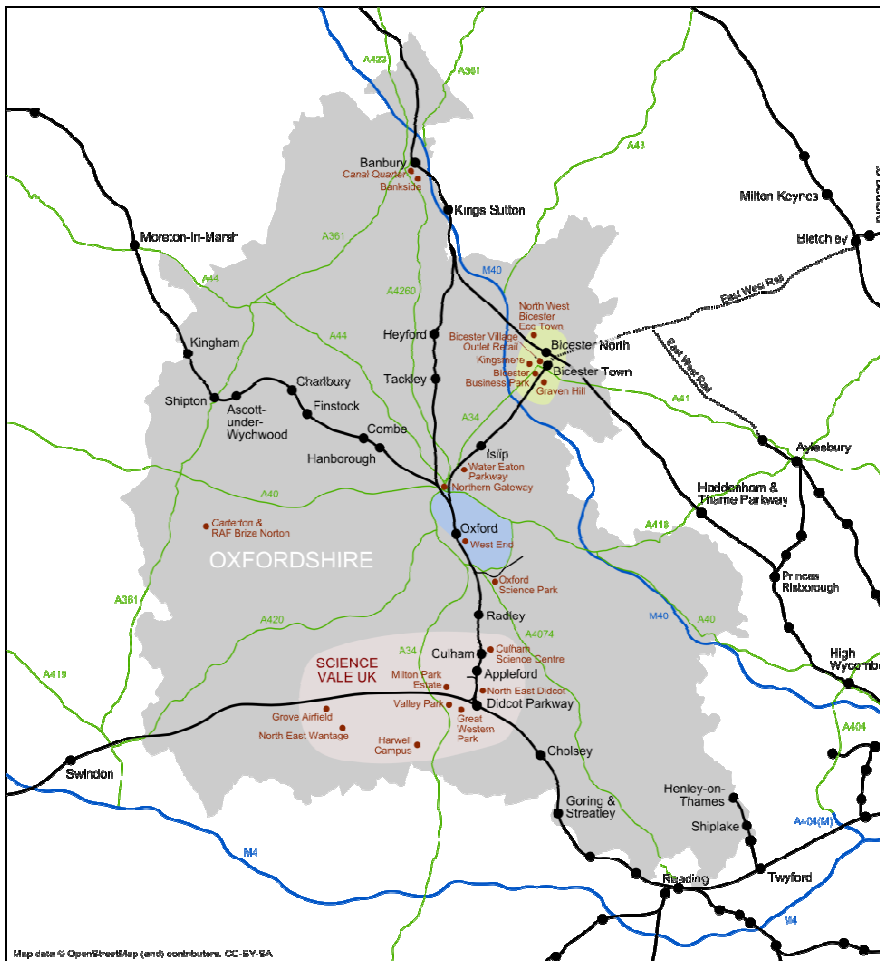
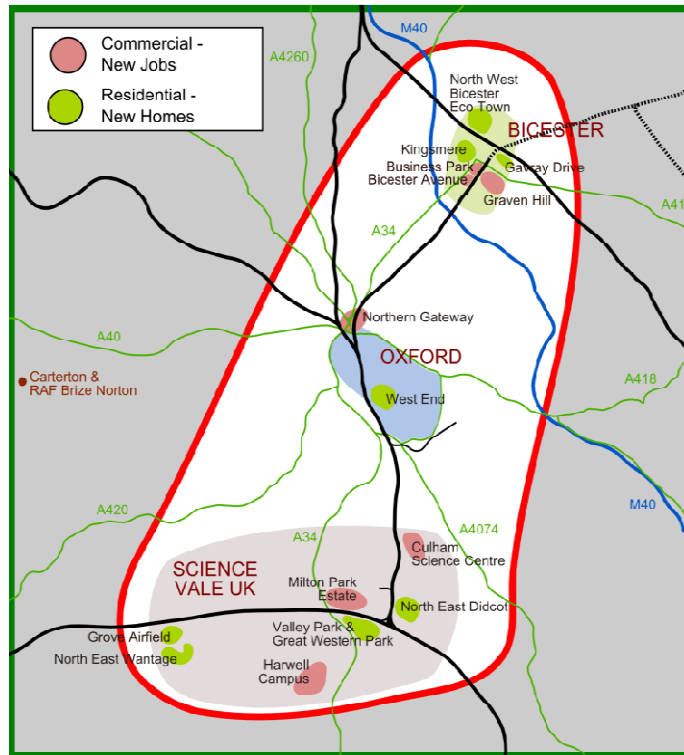
17. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - (a) **Approve the draft Rail Strategy for Oxfordshire as set out in Annex 2 of this report, for stakeholder consultation;**
 - (b) **Propose that a final version of this Strategy is brought back for approval by Cabinet (and incorporated into an updated LTP3 for Oxfordshire), taking into account views expressed.**

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Environment & Economy

Background papers: Nil
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December 2011

Annex 1 – Rail Supporting Growth and Development in Oxfordshire



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