

CABINET – 22 MAY 2012

RAIL STRATEGY & DELIVERY PLAN FOR OXFORDSHIRE

Report by Interim Deputy Director for Environment & Economy

Introduction

1. On 17 January 2012 Cabinet approved the draft Rail Strategy document for consultation, requesting officers to seek the views of the public and other interested stakeholders, and report back to Cabinet. A copy of the draft Rail Strategy document for consultation can be found with the papers for this meeting on the Council's website. Having completed the consultation we are now able to report on the outcome, and identify and propose changes which need to be made to the draft Rail Strategy.
2. Subject to approval, the final agreed version of the Rail Strategy, including any changes proposed, will be published in June 2012 as a supporting document to, and referenced in, the Council's updated Local Transport Plan 3.

Stakeholder Consultation and Engagement

3. Essential to achieving the ambitions set out in the Rail Strategy will be securing the support of stakeholders to identify the important contribution that rail can have in delivering a sustainable growth agenda in Oxfordshire and the South East. Investment in rail will play a key role in supporting Oxfordshire's economic development, and close working relationships between the Council, Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and the rail industry are crucial to success.
4. As a starting point it was vital to understand what local people and businesses need from the rail network now and in the future, and a six-week consultation took place between 6 February and 16 March, with 650 organisations and individuals invited to participate. In addition, the consultation was also open to the general public. Using the Council's consultation portal, it was possible for responses to be provided online, or by returning a pre-formatted document in the post.
5. Formal invitations were sent to parish and district councils, local businesses such as BMW and RWE npower who use the railway as part of their activities, Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and specialised interest groups such as Oxfordshire Unlimited and Railfuture.
6. Invitations were also sent to our rail industry partners dealing with strategy (Department for Transport), planning (Network Rail), safety (Office of the Rail Regulator), and the service providers (passenger and freight operators).

Consultation Outcome

7. In total, we received 89 responses (75 online and 14 by email or letter) and 980 individual comments were made. Each comment has been read and given full consideration when finalising the Rail Strategy.
8. Unfortunately not all our rail industry partners were able to respond within the six week period, but the three passenger train operators have now responded and their feedback has been included in our review of the draft Rail Strategy.
9. Regrettably we did not receive a response from Network Rail despite several attempts to contact them. The Department for Transport replied saying that staff were fully occupied working on the High Level Output Statement (HLOS) which will be issued in July setting out the Government's funding for the railway between 2014-2019. However they did note that we had correctly explained the rail industry's committed projects. We expect HLOS to include a Government commitment to fund East-West Rail between Reading, Didcot, Oxford, Bicester and Milton Keynes/Bedford.
10. The responses from the train operators' confirm their support for the overall aims and objectives we have set out, and the valuable collaborative partnership approach we have developed with them over the past decade. Coupled with intrinsic growth they see an exciting future for our rail network. They also recognise the very positive benefits that have arisen from service improvements, such as those funded by the Council between Oxford and Bicester where passenger numbers have risen 203% since 2007/08.
11. The draft Rail Strategy included key consultation questions on specific issues where we particularly wanted to seek a view or gauge opinion. Overall the draft strategy was welcomed, and the Council was congratulated for producing a comprehensive, well-researched and credible strategy.
12. In total, 85% of responses agreed that we had identified the right issues and aspirations, with 80% agreeing that our vision for rail to support economic growth and provide a sustainable and accessible network is the right one.
13. There was a high level of support for the Council's position in supporting and prioritising improvements to the Oxford-Bicester-London Route (Chiltern Railways' Evergreen 3 project), and the East-West Rail project.
14. There were many views expressed about improving connectivity between the county and other areas. The most popular were a rail link to Heathrow (and possibly at Gatwick) Airports, services from Oxford to Bristol and extension of Crossrail services to Reading. A station at Grove & Wantage was very well supported, as was a rail link to Carterton in the longer term.
15. There was agreement for the Council setting up an Information Partnership with bus and rail operators with 45% of respondents welcoming this initiative, and some encouraging support for the Council's involvement in extending the benefits of Community Rail.

16. The 138 issues that have been raised by more than one respondent, along with your officers' response and any suggested changes to the draft Rail Strategy are shown in the consultation report at Annex 1 to this report.

Proposed Changes to the Rail Strategy

17. Although there are no fundamental changes to the draft Rail Strategy arising from the consultation. However, in light of the comments we received we have taken the opportunity to enhance and improve some areas of the draft strategy to add clarity around the Council's position on some of the important strategic issues, such as:
- (a) **Oxford Station:** We are now working in partnership with the City Council, rail industry partners and other stakeholders to develop and implement a master plan for the station, which will set out how the station should be developed over time to achieve a significant upgrade to passenger and interchange facilities, the committed investment in electrification and resignalling and the measures needed to improve capacity and eliminate this national bottleneck.
 - (b) **Grove & Wantage Station:** We have strengthened the importance of a) investigating the potential passenger demand and wider benefits of a new station as a key strategic infrastructure scheme for accessing Didcot, Oxford and Science Vale UK and b) ensuring the station is not compromised by electrification. Feasibility work will begin during 2012 and will also look at how the station, in the context of planned and potential housing development, can be optimised.
 - (c) **Freight:** We will support rail industry proposals for facilitating freight growth on the railway, and will give the passenger and freight markets equal consideration. The recent upgrade of the railway between Southampton Port and the West Midlands has already raised rail's market share from 33% to 39%. Whilst local communities will want to protect and increase passenger services at their station that may not be the best use of the network if passenger numbers are low or have a history of limited growth or are unlikely to increase. Local communities might benefit more from fewer lorry journeys, less congestion and better road safety if freight is transferred to rail.
 - (d) **Kidlington Station:** This station, on the Oxford to Banbury mainline, had been promoted by the Council for many years. However, due to the numerous difficulties of serving a new station on that line, and with the emergence of the improvement project for the Oxford-Bicester-London Service (Evergreen 3), we are now of the view that the rail offer for Kidlington will be better met by Water Eaton Parkway Station, using the existing premium route bus services, footpaths and cycle ways to connect to it.
 - (e) **Carterton Rail Link:** There were a number of responses supporting this project but, as set out in the draft Rail Strategy, this is a longer-term objective that might not happen for several decades, and then

only if there is sufficient demand arising from a defence need or significant change in land use policy. It is unlikely the Council will be the promoter of such a large project.

18. A copy of the amended draft Rail Strategy can be found with the papers for this meeting on the Council's website.
19. We will be exploring the timescale and deliverability of the priority projects set out in the Rail Strategy as part of our engagement with potential operators of the new Greater Western franchise which comes into operation from April 2013 for a 15 year period.

Financial and Staff Implications

20. There are no direct financial or staff implications arising from this report. Any feasibility or project development work will be managed by, and use existing, identified resources.

RECOMMENDATION

21. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - (a) **note the outcome of the public and stakeholder consultation, as shown in the document at Annex 1 to this report; and**
 - (b) **subject to minor editorial changes and the changes proposed above, approve the final Oxfordshire Rail Strategy & Delivery Plan for publication.**

MARK KEMP

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Background papers: Cabinet Papers 17th January 2012
Draft Rail Strategy – May 2012

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