

**GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
17 SEPTEMBER 2012**

**GREAT WESTERN MAIN LINE RAILWAY ELECTRIFICATION:
IMPLICATIONS FOR OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

Report by Deputy Director (Commercial) Environment and Economy

Background

1. Network Rail is committed to delivering electrification of the Great Western Main Line by 2015. Erection of the overhead catenary will require changes to be made to bridge clearances along the route. The detail of the programme is being developed by Network Rail, however it is estimated that work will be required at some 28 locations along the Great Western Main Line, including the section up to Oxford.

Implications for Oxfordshire County Council

2. Whilst the majority of the bridges affected are owned by Network Rail there will be implications for the County Council – in the majority of cases as the highway authority, but in some instances as bridge owner too, (e.g. Steventon Station Railway Bridge)
3. Recent Government announcements to extend the electrification project beyond Oxford to the north will increase the number of bridges requiring works. However, the timing of the northwards electrification has yet to be confirmed.
4. Improved clearances may be achieved in a number of ways – for example lowering of the existing track, or raising the level of bridges. In some instances the works required may be no more than raised parapets on the existing bridges (in order to provide protection from the overheard wires).
5. In the majority of cases there will be implications of the bridge works on the County Council's highway network. Depending on the nature of the works required by Network Rail to the bridges these could include raising of the highway, installation of safety barriers, installation of traffic management (including potentially traffic signals) and/or other works to the highway. In addition, construction works may require temporary stopping up of the highway, with resultant diversions for traffic.
6. It is expected that Network Rail's approach will be to limit its liability to paying for works and/or replacement on a 'like-for-like' basis. However, in order to provide the clearances required for electrification the bridge works may require betterment compared with the existing situation. At this stage it is unclear as to who will be liable for the cost of any betterment.

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7. In some instances the need to undertake works associated with the electrification project may provide an opportunity for the County Council to undertake highway improvement works at the same location.
8. The situation is complicated by the fact that whilst the driver for the project is Network Rail's electrification project, in many instances technical approval for bridges carrying the highway and any alterations to the highway approaches rests with the County Council as the Highway Authority. The County Council is also responsible for considering and approving temporary closures of the highway to enable any bridge works to take place.
9. Whilst the detail of the programme of bridge works is still being developed, it is clear that there will be resource and financial implications for the County Council.
10. It is currently unclear whether Network Rail will compensate the County Council for any of our staff costs involved in helping facilitate their electrification scheme or whether they will be paying any commuted sums for any additional highway maintenance liabilities that may arise as a direct result of their scheme such as the on-going maintenance of additional traffic signals or antiskid surfacing.

Next steps

11. A project team is being established within the Environment and Economy Directorate to manage the County Council's involvement in this programme. Some initial meetings have already been held with Network Rail to discuss their proposals at some individual bridge sites. A further meeting is being sought with Network Rail to better understand the programming and potential cost implications for the County Council. As the programme of work develops the project team will liaise with local members affected by the programme.

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - (a) Note the contents of this report

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Background papers: None

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