



Citizens' Assembly Follow-Up Workshop on OxRAIL 2040

Prepared for

Oxfordshire County Council



September 2025

Executive Summary

On 23 September 2025, fourteen members of the Citizens' Assembly on Travel and Transport reconvened for a three-hour follow-up workshop on OxRAIL 2040, Oxfordshire County Council's plan for rail. Independently facilitated by MutualGain, the workshop built on the Assembly's earlier twenty recommendations and gave residents the opportunity to shape rail-specific recommendations during the Council's public consultation on the plan.

Participants came from urban, rural and market town areas across the County, and most were occasional or rare rail users. Drawing on their own experiences, previous Assembly learning and expert inputs, they worked in small groups to deliberate and develop collective recommendations.

Six recommendations were developed, with five achieving the 80% threshold used to indicate strong consensus.

Key recommendations included:

- Creating an integrated network map combining rail, bus, cycling and walking routes
- Establishing minimum connectivity and accessibility standards for all stations
- Encouraging young people's independent use of rail to foster long-term sustainable travel habits
- Ensuring a human presence at stations, supported by clear safety measures
- Opening smaller stations for wider community use, such as local initiatives, volunteers and charities

(See pages 12–13 for the full recommendations in participants' own words.)

A sixth recommendation, calling for investment to prioritise a countywide public transport system over rail-specific funding, received lower support (30%), though some participants agreed with aspects of its sentiment.

The workshop demonstrates how deliberative engagement can provide constructive, community-grounded insights to inform both OxRAIL 2040 and Oxfordshire's wider transport plans.



Introduction

On 23 September 2025, fourteen members of the Citizens' Assembly on Travel and Transport reconvened for a 3-hour Citizens' Workshop on OxRAIL 2040, Oxfordshire County Council's rail plan for Oxfordshire. The workshop was commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council and independently facilitated by MutualGain, the same provider as the Citizens' Assembly on Travel and Transport held in Spring 2025.

The Citizens' Assembly's twenty recommendations did not include recommendations specific to rail. At the time, participants noted that rail improvements often required investment beyond the Council's transport budget and therefore chose to focus their recommendations on other areas that they felt could have greater influence on the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP). However they expressed an interest in learning more about the Council's role and influence over rail. With the development of the new OxRAIL 2040 plan, this follow-up workshop offered a timely opportunity for Assembly members to further explore the future of rail in Oxfordshire and develop rail-related recommendations.

The purpose of the workshop was to generate new recommendations for OxRAIL 2040 and the future of rail in Oxfordshire, so that they could be considered by Oxfordshire County Council in the development of the plan. Participants were asked to build on their previous Assembly learning, continue their deliberative approach and propose recommendations that reflect the needs of people across the County.

The workshop resulted in six rail-related recommendations, which sit alongside the Assembly's original twenty recommendations that are currently being progressed by Oxfordshire County Council. The findings from the workshop will form part of the evidence base, alongside the findings from the Council's public consultation on OxRAIL 2040, to inform the Cabinet decision on whether to formally adopt the plan in November 2025.

This workshop, and the earlier one on the Oxford Temporary Congestion Charge (July 2025), reflect the Council's efforts to incorporate residents' perspectives into transport plans. They also show how the Council is continuing to engage Assembly members and build on the original recommendations as they are taken forward.

The following sections of this report set out:

- **Section 1:** the design and delivery of the workshop
- **Section 2:** the findings from participant discussions
- **Section 3:** the final recommendations, including the level of support from participants

SECTION 1: WORKSHOP DESIGN AND DELIVERY

This section describes who participated in the workshop and how the process was designed.

Who took part?

All thirty-four original Assembly members were contacted via email and phone and invited to take part in the OxRAIL 2040 workshop. Efforts were made to retain broad participation, including from digitally excluded participants, those with physical disabilities and neurodiverse individuals.

A total of fourteen participants attended, drawn from across Oxfordshire:

Area in Oxfordshire	%
Rural	21%
Market town	57%
Urban	21%

Before the session, participants completed a short survey on their rail use. The results showed variation in both frequency and purpose, with many using rail only occasionally:

How often do you use the railway?	%
Rarely/Never	45%
A few times a year	18%
A few times a month	18%
A few times a week	18%
Daily	0%

Those using rail a few times a week were commuting to work, while less frequent travellers mostly used rail for long-distance leisure. Participants described barriers: one wheelchair user explained that “trains are not independently accessible and it’s not worth the risk”. Another participant said they would use the train “if it were affordable”. Two others reported not using trains for years, citing a lack of confidence and the absence of a nearby station.

This context is important for understanding the recommendations and findings. The workshop brought together residents from across the County, many of whom rarely used rail. Their perspectives highlight both the barriers that limit current use and the opportunities to make rail a more attractive and practical option. As a result, the recommendations that follow are shaped not only by the views of regular users but also by those who could benefit from greater access to rail in the future.

Design of the Workshop

The workshop agenda combined expert inputs, small-group discussions and collective recommendation-making. Independent facilitators supported the process to ensure all participants could contribute fairly.

Participants first heard from four expert perspectives:

- **Council input** – Oxfordshire County Council (Head of Place Shaping and Rail Project Manager) (in person)
- **Community rail input** – Alayne MacDonald, Community Rail Development Manager, Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership (video)
- **Rail user advocacy input** – Richard Stow, Chair, Thames Valley Branch, Railfuture (in person)

Participants had an opportunity to put questions to the experts. Small-group discussions followed. These were structured in three stages:

- **Initial reflections:** What stood out from the plan, and what did participants feel was most important to remember as they began their deliberations?
- **Challenge question:** “Beyond tracks and trains, what else needs to be in a rail plan to make it work for people and places?” Participants were encouraged to reflect not only on personal experience but also through the lens of their local context (urban, market town, rural), ensuring that geographically diverse perspectives were included.
- **Recommendation drafting:** Groups developed six recommendations for the rail plan.

Section Two: Key Findings

This section presents the perspectives of Assembly members during workshop discussions, drawn from detailed facilitator notes. The findings are intended to support the development of OxRAIL 2040 by capturing participants' reflections and contextualising their final recommendations.

The section begins with participants' initial reactions to OxRAIL 2040, before presenting a thematic analysis of their deliberations on the challenge question: "Beyond tracks and trains, what else needs to be in a rail plan to make it work for people and places?"

The analysis integrates the recommendations agreed by participants, showing where each one stemmed from and how it was grounded in discussion. Together, these findings represent the considered views of Assembly members on how OxRAIL 2040 can best work for local people and places.

Initial Responses to OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail

When first introduced to the draft OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail, Assembly members broadly welcomed its vision and priorities, particularly the ambition to reopen lines and deliver new stations.

"The spine is a good investment and I'm anticipating the reopening of the Cowley Branch line"

"Great concept on the face of it, more stations and access points – positive economically"

At the same time, some reactions reflected surprise at the scale of the plan and raised questions about feasibility, affordability and delivery.

"First time I've seen a rail plan spanning so many years and [I'm] surprised to see"

"Is this pie in the sky? Where is the money coming from?"

One group highlighted the importance of clearly communicating the plan's long-term objectives and proposals. They spent time exploring the 'concept train service plan' in the consultation handout, with one participant commenting:

"I'm finding it confusing looking at the two maps side by side. The current rail map (p4) and the concept service plan (p9) are designed differently and it makes it hard to see what's actually changing. If they were in the same style, it would be much clearer."

As discussions developed, initial reflections shifted towards a deeper exploration of how the rail system would function in practice for residents across Oxfordshire. Members considered issues including affordability, accessibility and connectivity, emphasising that OxRAIL 2040 should contribute to a genuinely usable countywide public transport system for all. These conversations set the stage for some of the solution-focused deliberations that followed:

Ticketing: pricing and complexity

High ticket prices were widely seen as a barrier to using rail. Participants described fares as unaffordable compared with car travel, particularly when travelling in groups. Ticketing complexity also discouraged use, with "too many options", confusing split tickets, and little integration across modes. Suggestions included fare caps, simpler systems, and a "single ticket valid across all public transport". Members welcomed initiatives like the Oxfordshire Metro, which could help address these issues.

Accessibility for wheelchair users

Alongside affordability, members reflected on the everyday challenges of using rail, particularly for passengers with mobility needs. They noted that wheelchair users often depend on staff to deploy ramps when boarding or alighting. Participants welcomed the prospect of new trains being level with platforms, which would improve independence and ease of use.

Rethinking carriage space

Members also discussed the design of carriages. They suggested reducing first-class capacity to ease overcrowding and rethinking layouts to serve a wider range of needs, such as quiet spaces, carriages for people travelling to events and spaces designed for passengers with sensory needs.

Testing feasibility

Some members raised concerns that major rail projects, such as new stations or line upgrades can proceed without adequate feasibility work. Some felt authorities pushed ahead with bold plans without fully assessing local impacts, citing experiences of increased road congestion, insufficient parking and safety issues at level crossings. They called for more rigorous feasibility studies to be embedded in OxRAIL 2040 planning.

Balancing rail with wider transport needs

Some members raised concerns about gaps in rail coverage in the west, asking, “**What about the west?**”. They noted that areas of West Oxfordshire face significant congestion and questioned how inclusive the rail plan was for the County as a whole.

This led some members to consider the balance of investment between rail and other forms of sustainable transport. Rail was described by some as expensive, unreliable, and inflexible and they cautioned that an integrated transport network focused too heavily on rail could risk overlooking the west. This perspective informed **Recommendation 6**, although support for it was limited. Others stressed that rail remains vital for attracting national investment and ensuring Oxfordshire stays connected to the rest of the country.

These reflections on practical barriers, passenger experience and the strategic role of rail provided a foundation for the next stage of discussion, where Assembly members considered the central challenge question: “*Beyond tracks and trains, what else needs to be in a rail plan to make it work for people and places?*”

“Beyond tracks and trains, what else needs to be in a rail plan to make it work for people and places?”

Assembly members approached this question collectively, drawing on the spirit of the original Citizens’ Assembly. They considered both barriers to rail use and opportunities to encourage greater uptake and support sustainable travel. **Participants welcomed the OxRAIL 2040 vision.** Their discussions built on the plan’s priorities and proposals, while also bringing their own experiences and insights to think strategically about what else is needed to make rail work for local people and places.

Discussions were wide ranging covering issues from connectivity and affordability to safety, ticketing and feasibility. Three main themes emerged, which underpinned six recommendations for rail. These were:

- 1. Connectivity to stations and multimodal options**
- 2. Safety and accessibility around stations**
- 3. How local stations could benefit communities**

1. Connectivity to Stations and Multimodal Options

Assembly members welcomed the planned upgrades to rail lines and the opening of new stations in market towns, seeing them as valuable opportunities to improve connectivity and promote sustainable travel. They stressed that while infrastructure improvements were welcome, integration with other travel modes would be key to ensuring increased use of rail. Participants liked the Council’s commitment to enhancing multimodal connections, such as better bus integration and the Oxfordshire Metro:

“Are there reliable and connected routes at the end of each station?”

“The start and end of a journey when connecting with a train is a problem.”

Participants emphasised that stations need to function as hubs within a wider network, supporting travel across different modes, in particular bus connectivity.

Bus Connectivity

Participants consistently highlighted the importance of “reliable”, “predictable”, and “well-coordinated” buses in making stations practical and attractive for rail users. Misaligned timetables and low service frequency were described as barriers:

“Bus availability (one per hour) not coordinated with trains, means long waits.”

Others pointed to significant gaps in provision, such as the “**lack of buses four miles outside of the city after 7pm**” which left one participant facing a £20 taxi fare. Another called for “**better linkages at big stations**” to strengthen the overall network. Participants welcomed the Council’s existing efforts to coordinate bus and train timetables and encouraged further action:

“Timetables – it’s the way the plan works!”

Stations as Mobility Hubs

Stations need to support a wide range of onward journeys. Walking and wheeling were seen as key modes, but concerns were raised about the security of current storage facilities. Suggestions included secure bike parking, easier options for taking bikes on trains and more flexible carriage space:

“Some trains you need to book a place for bikes. This stops people using trains with bikes.”

Accessibility and comfort were also central. Participants called for flexible spaces for pushchairs and wheelchairs, access for scooters and taxis and adequate toilet facilities. For larger stations, they emphasised warm, welcoming waiting areas and food options.

Some members highlighted the need, in some instances, to drive and park at a station, and there should be adequate parking to do so. Others reminded them of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) targets and the Assembly’s earlier commitment to reducing car use and prioritising more sustainable modes. They sought to balance these perspectives: not encouraging car dependence, but ensuring stations remain accessible for those who may still need to drive as Oxfordshire transitions towards more sustainable travel, especially through the availability of disability spaces.

The points of discussion above inspired two recommendations:

Recommendation 1 calls for the development of an integrated network map showing “connectivity in its entirety.” This would overlay rail, bus and active travel routes, include accessibility details and be available both digitally and physically.

Recommendation 2 proposes that stations should have a checklist of minimum requirements which must be met. The checklist should consider how people get to stations:

- Bus – regular services from key locations
- Bike – safe routes, secure storage and options for taking bikes on trains
- Walking – safe pedestrian access
- Parking – availability of accessible spaces

Taken together, these discussions show that while members welcomed new stations and line upgrades, they stressed that their success depends on reliable connecting services, secure and accessible facilities and clear information.

2. Safety and Accessibility Around Stations

Participants stressed that stations should feel safe, secure and welcoming, particularly in rural areas. They highlighted the importance of good lighting, CCTV, working panic buttons and visible staff. One participant captured a shared concern:

“Unmanned stations feel less safe.”

The role of staff was seen as essential for reassurance and practical support, especially for disabled passengers who might otherwise avoid stations due to broken lifts or a lack of assistance. Participants argued that safety and accessibility should not rely on machines alone, but on human presence for both inclusion and confidence.

Recommendation 4 proposes having: “a human presence at the heart of every station” to reassure passengers. This could include ticket inspectors making visits, café staff keeping an eye out, or community volunteers at smaller stations. This will “give people the confidence to use stations.”

Where continuous staffing is not realistic, participants emphasised the need for clear safety measures, including:

- CCTV
- good lighting
- panic buttons and phone points linked to real staff
- real-time train updates

They also suggested that larger stations could oversee smaller ones, with staff able to respond and get to a station within 15 minutes, as well as carrying out regular visits to check cleanliness and facilities.

Safety and accessibility were viewed as closely linked. Members proposed more, and clearer, signing with phone numbers so that help could be dispatched quickly if needed. They also emphasised the importance of rural stations providing shelter, warmth and protection from the wind, features viewed as essential for making stations safe, comfortable and usable for all.

3. How Local Stations Could Benefit Communities

Assembly members discussed how stations could be more than points of transit, reimagining them as valuable community spaces. Smaller, low-frequency, or unmanned stations were seen as opportunities to provide social value, safety and local pride. As one participant put it:

“Creating a place that’s more than just a station.”

Building on earlier discussions about safety, members also highlighted how volunteers at stations could not only reassure passengers but also help foster community connection. They envisioned stations as places where people could meet, support one another and benefit from local initiatives.

Recommendation 5: Open smaller stations to greater community use. Ideas included:

- volunteers helping to staff stations
- space for charities and mental health organisations
- displays of school and local artists’ work
- “talk benches” where people could sit and chat

Redefining Station Space

Participants also suggested creative ways to rethink station space, especially in rural areas. Ideas included repurposing ticket machine areas, converting vans, setting up affordable shops run by local people and adding more greenery to make stations welcoming.

Members stressed the importance of authorities reducing red tape and making a clear, non-commercial commitment to community use. This, they argued, would unlock creative solutions and empower residents to shape how stations are used.

Another recommendation built on the themes above, focusing specifically on how rail could help embed sustainable travel habits in young people.

Recommendation 3: Extend the idea of stations as community assets to young people.

Participants suggested initiatives that would build independence and confidence in using rail for young people, supporting long-term sustainable travel habits. Examples included designated carriages for school trips and accommodations for vulnerable groups.

Designated carriages for school trips

Participants asked the Council to check whether rail providers still make designated carriages available for school trips, so that pupils could travel separately and to ensure this offer is actively promoted to schools, especially those supporting pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

For participants, stations and rail should function as community assets as well as serving transport needs.

Summary of key findings

Overall, these key findings show how initial reflections and wide-ranging discussions later converged around three core themes: connectivity to stations and multimodal options, safety and accessibility and how local stations could benefit communities. These themes formed the foundation for the recommendations, grounding them in residents' insights and priorities.

Recommendations by theme:

Theme	Recommendation
Connectivity to stations and multimodal options	1, 2 & 6
Safety and accessibility around stations	4
How local stations could benefit communities	3 & 5

Section Three: Recommendations

The following table presents six recommendations for OxRAIL 2040 and the future of rail in Oxfordshire, along with the level of participant support.

An 80% support threshold was used to indicate strong consensus.

No.	Recommendation	% support
1	<p>We recommend that the Council develop an integrated network map showing connectivity in its entirety. This should be made by overlaying rail, bus and active travel routes onto the same map. It should have a key with accessibility information, including information from the checklist in Recommendation 2.</p> <p>The map should be available digitally and physically.</p>	100%
2	<p>Stations should have a checklist of minimum requirements which must be met or [if not met] clearly demonstrated unnecessary. The checklist should consider how people get to stations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bus – are there regular services from key locations? • Bike – are there cycle routes, bike sheds and are you able to take bikes on the train? • Walking – can you walk on a safe route to the station? • Parking – are there accessible parking spaces available? 	100%
3	<p>Embed the use of rail for young people by encouraging the wider use of trains and supporting independent rail travel.</p> <p>There are also groups to be considered where accommodations should be made, for example, vulnerable children who are educated outside the school system and/or who are under CAMHS.</p> <p>On trains, school trips should be able to travel for free with designated carriages.</p> <p>By doing the above, you are investing in younger generations to adopt behaviour change.</p>	100%

No.	Recommendation	% support
4	<p>We recommend that the rail plan places a human presence at the heart of every station. This could be ticket enforcers dropping in on stations, café workers keeping an eye open, ticket office staff or community volunteers. This will give people the confidence to use stations.</p> <p>If informal social control, we recommend providing CCTV, better lighting, panic points or phone points and train updates.</p>	93%
5	<p>Support the clever use of smaller, low frequency, unmanned stations by the community: increasing social and community involvement. This could be through volunteers manning the stations.</p> <p>Open station space to charities, mental health organisations, local schools and artists to display their work. Have “talk benches” where people can sit and chat.</p> <p>The benefits of this would be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a safer environment and the reassurance of having a person there. They could also liaise with train companies re difficulties and help with problems at the station. • a greater use of station space – for example, by dog walkers getting a coffee or local people wanting a chat. <p>Authorities need to reduce red tape to enable this to happen and make a clear non-commercial commitment to using station space for the social good of the community.</p>	93%
6	<p>Based on learning from the Citizens’ Assembly, we took away that trains are expensive and inflexible. The money proposed for OxRAIL 2040 (which the council haven’t got) should be used to provide a safe, reliable, flexible, integrated and state of the art countywide public transport system.</p> <p>This doesn’t mean existing rail or improvements to rail aren’t included in this public transport system.</p>	30%

Conclusion

The OxRAIL 2040 follow-up workshop built directly on the Citizens' Assembly held earlier in 2025, showing how deliberative engagement can provide continuity and depth in shaping long-term transport planning. Participants drew on their lived experience, shared learning and expert input to explore how the plan could best work for people and places across Oxfordshire.

Their discussions reflected both enthusiasm for the vision of OxRAIL 2040 and thoughtful consideration of its feasibility, accessibility, affordability and integration with wider transport needs. In many cases, the learning and shared positions from the Assembly also shaped these discussions. For example, when exploring the connectivity of new stations, participants reintroduced concepts like mobility hubs and when drafting recommendations they drew on guiding commitments from the Assembly, including the importance of reducing car use in ways that work for Oxfordshire's residents.

The six recommendations developed at the workshop highlight what members see as essential for making the plan work for people and places across Oxfordshire: reliable multimodal connections, safe and accessible stations and spaces that support community benefit.

Five of the six recommendations achieved strong consensus, highlighting where residents agreed on key proposals for rail's success in Oxfordshire. While the sixth recommendation received lower support, it nevertheless reflects an important perspective on the balance between rail investment and the County's wider transport system.

Taken together, these findings underline the Assembly members' commitment to a rail plan that is practical, inclusive and future-focused, supporting the targets of the LTCP and building on the Assembly's original recommendations on wider transport in the County. They provide Oxfordshire County Council with grounded, community-driven insights to inform OxRAIL 2040 and help ensure the plan delivers benefits that are widely shared across the County.



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Appendix I

The table below compares the demographic breakdown of participants in the original Citizens' Assembly (n=34) and those who attended the OxRAIL 2040 workshop (n=14).

Characteristic	Assembly Count (34)	Assembly (%)	Workshop Count (14)	Workshop %
Gender				
Female	17	50	7	50
Male	16	47	7	50
Non Binary or Other	1	3	0	0
Age				
16-24	5	15	1	7
25-34	5	15	2	14
35-44	5	15	2	14
45-54	6	18	4	29
55-64	6	18	3	21
65+	7	21	2	14

Characteristic	Assembly Count (34)	Assembly (%)	Workshop Count (14)	Workshop %
Ethnicity				
Asian or Asian British	2	6	0	0
Black or Black African or Carribean	0	0	0	0
Mixed or Multiple Ethnicities	0	0	0	0
White British	26	76	10	71
Other Ethnic Group (aggregated to protect individual identities where numbers were 1)	6	15	4	29
Disability				
Yes, limited a lot or a little	5	15	2	14
No	29	85	12	86
Education				
No qualification, Level 1 & Level 2	12	35	5	36
Level 3, Apprenticeship, Other	7	21	2	14

Characteristic	Assembly Count (34)	Assembly (%)	Workshop Count (14)	Workshop %
Level 4 and above	15	44	7	50
Views on Climate Change				
Not at all concerned	1	3	0	0
Not very concerned	5	15	1	7
Fairly concerned	14	41	6	43
Very concerned	14	41	7	50
Other	0	0	0	0
Do they have children?				
No	24	71	9	64
Yes	10	29	5	36
Driving Frequency				
Five days a week or more	8	24	3	21
Two to four days a week	11	32	4	29
Once a week or less	11	32	6	43

Characteristic	Assembly Count (34)	Assembly (%)	Workshop Count (14)	Workshop %
Not driven in the last four weeks, or never	4	12	1	7
Geography				
Cherwell	5	15	4	29
Oxford	10	29	2	14
South Oxfordshire	7	21	3	21
Vale of White Horse	9	26	4	29
West Oxfordshire	3	9	1	7
Urban/Market Town/Rural				
Urban	22	65	3	21
Market Town	6	18	8	57
Rural	6	18	3	21