

Growth Board 1st February 2018
Agenda item – Oxfordshire Rail Connectivity Study
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Oxfordshire Rail Connectivity Study

1.0 Purpose of report

- 1.1 An opportunity has arisen for the Oxfordshire Growth Board to play a key role in the development, delivery and governance of the Government’s proposed Rail Connectivity Study for Oxfordshire, announced in the autumn budget.
- 1.2 This report seeks Growth Board support to discuss this opportunity further with Department for Transport, the Rail Industry and other local rail stakeholders and to endorse this principle.
- 1.3 The report also seeks support for a new sub-group of the Growth Board to work alongside key stakeholders to develop a rail manifesto for Oxfordshire.

2.0 Recommendation

The Growth Board is recommended to:

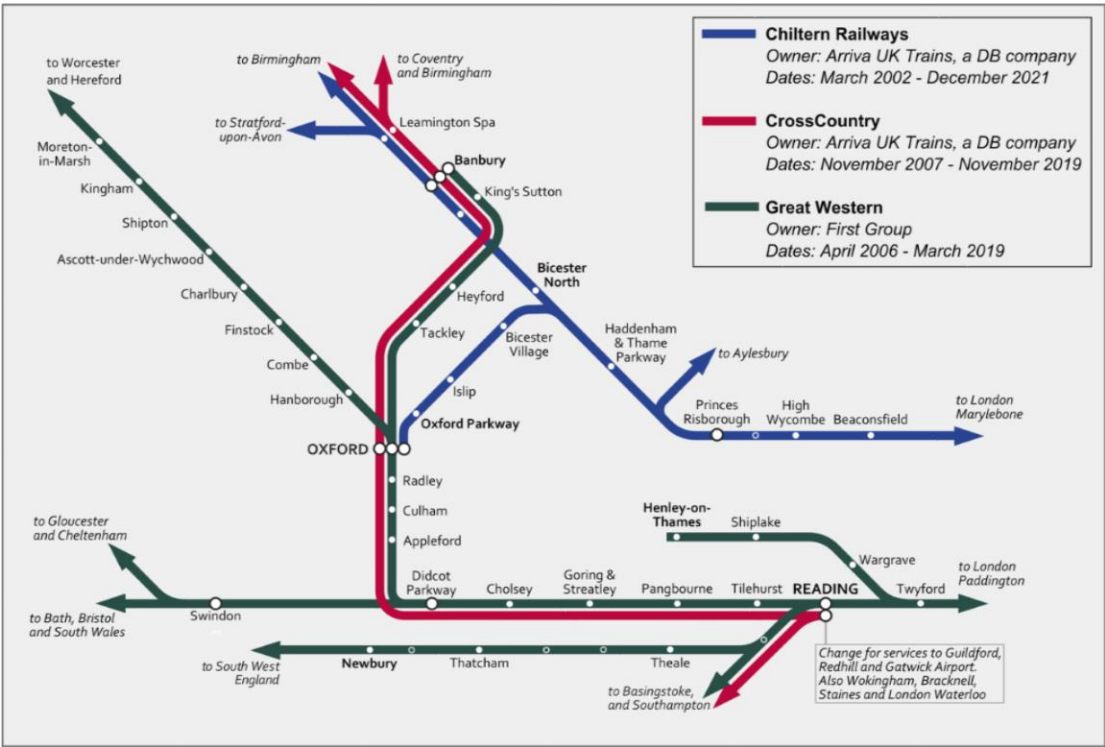
- 2.1 Work with Department for Transport, Network Rail and Oxfordshire train operators to develop a brief and complete the Government’s announced Rail Connectivity Study for Oxfordshire; and,
- 2.2 Provide the governance framework and accountable body role (via Oxfordshire County Council) for the project from conception to completion, including establishing an Oxfordshire Growth Board Rail Sub-Group; and,
- 2.3 Agree to consider providing some element of local match funding in the form of officer capacity to support the completion of this project.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 In the Government’s Autumn Statement, £300,000 was identified for a rail connectivity study for Oxfordshire. Re-opening of the Cowley Branch Line was specifically referenced as a key deliverable project in both the National Infrastructure Commission’s November report to the Treasury regarding investment in the Oxford to Cambridge corridor and was also referenced in his budget speech.
- 3.2 While this is a vital project which we support as an investment priority, there is a wider strategic rail context within which this and many other key rail infrastructure and service enhancement projects sit – for example the rail corridor through and including Oxford Station, East West Rail Phase 2 and development of the Cotswold Line. This is proposed as the emphasis of the study.

3.3 The Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) has identified a global infrastructure funding gap of approximately £8.4bn – the most significant element, accounting for over half of that gap, is investment in heavy rail throughout Oxfordshire. Building on Network Rail’s previous rail strategies, the priorities for investment in Oxfordshire’s Local Transport Plan (which includes an agreed Rail Strategy), the Strategic Economic Plan and the priorities of the main rail operators serving the county, the connectivity study does not need to focus on identification of schemes; the inter-dependencies, key barriers to implementation and the optimal timetabling for investment is what needs to be drawn out and better articulated.

3.4 Heavy rail infrastructure provides a solid spine for existing growth in Oxfordshire as shown on map below. However, while it has the potential to be a strong infrastructure to build on to enable future housing, economic and rail passenger and freight growth, it is imperative it gets a massive injection of funding to enable this framework to hold together and accommodate the level of employment and housing growth proposed for Oxfordshire.



4 Proposed Scope and Organisation of the Study

4.1 Investment in rail – notably Phase 1 of the East West Rail project including the opening of Oxford Parkway station – is already demonstrating the pivotal role that rail has in supporting and enabling transformational growth and enhancing connectivity between major centres of growth.

4.2 The following key initiatives and investments are required to ensure rail continues to play a key role in allowing growth ambitions for Oxfordshire and beyond to be realised:

- New track and platform capacity, technology new station building and other facilities at Oxford;
 - Four-tracking between Oxford and Didcot, with an initial focus on capacity between Oxford and Radley;
 - Opening up the Cowley Branch Line to passenger travel with new stations at the Oxford Science and Business Parks;
 - Capacity upgrade of the Cotswold Line, including track dualling between Oxford and Hanborough;
 - Station enhancements and capacity improvements including car parking at Didcot, Banbury, Hanborough, Oxford Parkway, Bicester Village and Culham;
 - New Parkway station at Grove with associated new regional rail service connecting Bristol, Swindon and Oxford to East West Rail;
 - Potential new station at Begbroke associated with new development;
 - Local level crossing upgrades at Bicester and on the Oxford-Banbury line
 - Bespoke infrastructure requirements at specific locations on the network, for example Bridge replacement at Steventon.
- 4.3 The Oxfordshire Rail Connectivity Study (ORCS) can act as a catalyst for all stakeholders to agree in time a Rail Manifesto for Oxfordshire. Using the evidence base provided by the ORCS, a manifesto setting out the agreed priorities, their timing (including the interface with the rail franchising processes that will be taking place for all three main rail operators in Oxfordshire over the next few years) and the key actions required to seek and secure funding for delivery will be drawn up. This would be jointly approved and owned by all Stakeholders, with a shared, agreed programme of priorities for Rail investment (and how this would support growth locally and across the wider Oxford to Cambridge corridor) a clear and visible outcome. The sub-group will play a key role to support the development of the manifesto.
- 4.4 There is an opportunity for all local major stakeholders to play a role in delivery of the ORCS and for existing governance arrangements to be used. Through the governance of the Oxfordshire Growth Board, and possibly aligned with the terms of the Oxfordshire Growth Deal, a new Rail Infrastructure Sub-Group should be established to oversee the delivery of the ORCS, completed by autumn 2018.
- 4.5. The Sub-Group is proposed to consist of representatives from:
- Department for Transport
 - Network Rail
 - Great Western, Chiltern Railways and Cross Country Trains
 - East West Rail consortium and/or England's Economic Heartland
 - Oxfordshire County Council as Local Highway Authority
 - Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership
 - District and City Council as Local Planning Authorities
 - Stagecoach and Go Ahead Bus Companies
- 4.6 There is no formal guidance yet to the conditions of the fund, but it is proposed that an element of local match funding is secured. It is recommended that local resource is offered as an element of match-funding to support the Study

moving forward. Programme progress will be provided regularly to each meeting of the Oxfordshire Growth Board.