

Growth Board 11th June 2018
Agenda item – Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study
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Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study

1.0 Purpose of report

1.1 At its February meeting, the Growth Board agreed to:

- Work with Department for Transport, Network Rail and Oxfordshire train operators to develop a brief for the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study;
- Provide a governance framework and accountable body role for the Study including establishing an Oxfordshire Growth Board Rail Sub-Group;
- Provide an element of local match funding in the form of resource capacity to support the completion of this project

1.2 This report outlines progress made (in partnership with the Department for Transport, rail industry and other parties) in developing the remit for this study and sets out the proposed way forward. A copy of the latest draft study remit is attached as Annex 1 – it is important to note this remit is still being finalised and remains subject to final approval.

2.0 Recommendation

The Growth Board is recommended to:

- 2.1 Endorse the draft remit for the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study as set out in Annex 1, subject to final DfT and Network Rail approval.
- 2.2 Confirm a Growth Board cash contribution of up to £200,000 towards the study, to be supplemented by other funding sources set out in this paper.
- 2.3 Agree that the County Council as strategic transport authority and accountable body for the Growth Board should act as the lead authority on the study for the Growth Board, including leading on commercial and funding arrangements, drawing in technical and other input from partner authorities, to be coordinated via the proposed Oxfordshire Corridor Study Steering Group.

3.0 Background

3.1 The Oxfordshire Rail Corridor study is vital project and an investment priority for Oxfordshire, to:

- Establish the priorities for rail investment in Oxfordshire, including setting out the Strategic Outline Business Cases for specified interventions, building upon (and updating) the work completed as part of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure

Strategy (which recognised the importance of investment in rail infrastructure, identifying a number of strategic interventions required) and previous work undertaken by the rail industry;

- Demonstrate how prioritised rail investment can support the economy and wider development in Oxfordshire, including the Housing & Growth deal (and the commitment to housing provision it includes) and the emerging Joint Strategic Spatial Plan;
- Ensure that the opportunities and benefits of proposed national rail investment (in particular the planned phases of East West Rail) can be secured.

3.2 Following the announcement in the Government's Autumn Statement of £300,000 for the study, it has been confirmed that a requirement for an equivalent level of match funding is required by the DfT for this project to progress and Government funding to be released.

4 Proposed Scope and Organisation of the Study

4.1 The draft remit sets out the study context; objectives and outcomes; scope, approach and Governance. It will also include a costed programme for the work once this has been finalised and agreed and a Shareholder / Stakeholder arrangement which reflects the proposal for study match funding.

Specific points to draw out from the remit include:

- The strategic rail connectivity context of the study, in terms of supporting growth across the wider NIC Oxford to Cambridge corridor and beyond, as well as local rail within Oxfordshire, including a proposed geographic scope for infrastructure interventions (as opposed to rail service provision)
- The emphasis being placed on wider benefits, in particular GVA uplift, of rail investment, to enable partners to better understand the relative benefits of different rail service patterns and infrastructure requirements, so that we can prioritise investment
- The linkages and interdependencies with the emerging Oxfordshire Local Industrial strategy
- The ability of the study to progress strategic outline business cases, to release further scheme development funding, with the aim of reducing the gap (both in funding and timescale terms) between aspirations/priorities being agreed and the investment taking place
- The distinction between Shareholders in the project (parties that would provide direct funding), Tier 1 major Stakeholders, and other Stakeholders. Consideration will need to be given to how Oxfordshire is best represented on the Corridor Study Steering Group, and the relationship between this group and the proposed Growth Board Rail Sub Group.

- The study work continuing to be led by Network Rail, but drawing in contributions from other partners, including the potential for commissioning specialist input (for example to quantify the economic / GVA benefits of different interventions or investment scenarios)
 - A tighter project timescale than originally envisaged by Network Rail, with the majority of the outputs anticipated to be available by the end of the 2018/19 Business Year
 - The central role that upgrade of capacity and station facilities at Oxford station will play, in terms of enabling other rail proposals
 - Development of the feasibility work required for the Cowley Branch Line will progress in parallel with the wider study, again enabled by the additional match funding
- 4.2 The Governance for the study is currently being finalised. In principle, it is proposed to be jointly approved and owned by all funding Shareholders, who would comprise – along with Network Rail – an Oxfordshire Corridor Study Steering Group which would oversee the study programme. This group should be established by the summer once Shareholder funding arrangements have been confirmed.
- 4.3 There will also be opportunities for all local major stakeholders to play a role in development and finalisation of the study, with workshops and other engagement opportunities to be undertaken.
- 4.4 The DfT requirement is for an equal match funding contribution of £300,000. The proposal is for this to comprise £150,000 - £200,000 from the Growth Board, with the remaining £100,000 - £150,000 to come from a combination of contributions from other partners, with some additional ‘work in kind’ resource. Partners being approached include Rail operators, the East West Rail Consortium and the England’s Economic Heartland Alliance.
- 4.5 As part of its role in acting as lead Authority for the Growth Board on this study, and to ensure that the appropriate arrangements exist for study management, governance and funding, it is proposed that the County Council enters into a Commercial Services Agreement with Network Rail, an industry regulatory requirement. Subject to confirmation, it is also proposed that the Council would also use this agreement to draw in contributions from other Shareholders it already works as part of, for example East West Rail and the EEH Alliance
- 4.6 The Project Remit will be finalised following consideration by the relevant decision-making bodies within the DfT and Network Rail. Any significant changes to the Remit will be reported back via Growth Board Executive Officers Group for the necessary consideration.

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