

**Statement of case for Transport and Works Act 1992 Public Inquiry**

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**General**

1. I am the Member of Parliament for Oxford West and Abingdon. The Chiltern Rail proposal being discussed involves Water Eaton Station and a rail line which travels directly through several residential areas of my constituency. I am also a resident of the Waterways development in Summertown.
2. I support the Chiltern Rail proposal in principle, as it has the potential to bring several environmental and economic benefits to the constituency and the region.
3. However, I have received representations from many concerned constituents, contacting me by telephone, e-mail and letter, during surgeries and small community meetings.
4. These constituents, the majority of whom live in the vicinity of the rail line, have stated their properties are already affected by a high level of noise and pollution from the rail line as well as by nearby roads. They are concerned about the potential for a deterioration of their quality of life caused by the impact proposed double track, the increased amount of traffic on the line, and the higher speed of the trains.
5. Constituents have also expressed concerns about the effect the proposal will have on local traffic levels, especially around the A40/A34/M40 interchange, one of the most congested traffic routes in the county.
6. Chiltern Rail has made many good efforts at reaching out to the community to discuss its proposal, including meeting with local councillors, holding public meetings, and responding to my correspondence quickly and comprehensively. I myself have spoken with the Chairman of Chiltern Rail, Adrian Shooter, on the phone, met with Allan Dare and corresponded with them on behalf of a number of constituents over the last few months.
7. However, some residents claim they did not receive the house to house leaflets that formed part of the consultation and others have expressed frustration at the lack of evidence provided for some of the company's claims, either in general publications or correspondence on specific queries.

## **Noise concerns**

8. Constituents are particularly concerned about whether or not these plans will lead to an increase of freight traffic on the line. They tell me they have repeatedly asked Chiltern Rail for an estimate of the effect the expanded line will have on freight traffic, but are told Chiltern Rail is not responsible for the line's freight traffic. This has led to concerns the increase in rail traffic, especially larger freight trains, may be higher than indicated by Chiltern Rail's models. It would be helpful if more efforts were made to model potential best case and worst case scenario models for increased freight traffic and its effect on noise and air pollution.
9. Chiltern Rail has proposed that trains on the line will travel between 75mph to 100mph through residential stretches. Constituents have questioned why trains could not be slowed to 40mph while passing stretches of residential housing, such as in Wolvercote and Summertown. This will, I understand, increase travel times by small amounts but I am informed that other residential areas receive more stringent speed restrictions, including near Oxford Station and on the Bicester Chord line.
10. Residents do not believe Chiltern Rail's assurances that noise levels will not be affected by the proposed expansion. They believe further testing must take place in order for them to be assured the company's figures are not too low.
11. They also note that even if Chiltern Rail's predictions of noise levels were accurate, they may have serious health implications for local residents and schools. Because of these health concerns, they believe every option available should be used to reduce noise levels, including slowing trains and adding sound barriers.

## **Lakeside residents**

12. I have received a particularly high number of representations from Lakeside residents, where track levels are above ground level and some of whom have houses which sit less than 8 metres from the proposed expanded line. Some remember freight traffic travelling the line during the construction of the M40 which caused houses to vibrate and disturbed sleep.
13. These residents are also concerned about the dangers of train derailment because of their proximity to the line, although this is a highly unlikely scenario. But given the catastrophic potential for such an incident residents require reassurance.
14. To mitigate the pollution, noise and danger, Lakeside residents have expressed to me their desire for Chiltern to provide robust costing and analysis of providing a full or half tunnel along this specific stretch of rail line as I believe is common in some European countries.

### **Traffic Concerns**

15. Chiltern Rail's traffic studies have found there will be reductions in traffic in many areas of the region. However, Chiltern Rail found that traffic around Water Eaton station approach junction will increase by significant measures, and the Kidlington roundabout will also see an increase. As mentioned above this area is already one of the most congested in the county and it is important that in providing one transport solution we do not create another problem.
16. The company has proposed remodelling the existing road layout around the Water Eaton station approach to mitigate the increase in traffic. Constituents believe an independent evaluation of these proposals must occur for them to be assured the proposal will function as expected.

### **Pollution concerns**

17. Chiltern Rail states that pollutant concentrations at residential properties near the rail line will not increase significantly. This area already suffers from poor air quality, however, and residents remain concerned that diesel particulates and other pollutants may, in fact, have a negative impact locally.

### **Aristotle Lane Allotments**

18. I have also been contacted by the Trap Ground Allotment Association concerning access to the Trap Group Allotments and the level crossing at Aristotle Lane, Oxford.
19. At the moment the allotments are accessed either via a level crossing or via a long bridge which accesses the allotments in a corner which is frequently flooded in winter. This flooding makes the bridge unsuitable as a sole point of access.
20. There has been some concern on the part of allotment owners that the level crossing would be closed before an alternative was in place and that, therefore, if that coincided with flooding allotment owners would be unable to access the site for an indefinite period.
21. After discussing this with Chiltern Rail, I have been assured that the level crossing will not be closed before an appropriate replacement has been constructed and is operational.
22. Allotment owners were also concerned about the difficulties of providing an alternative bridge that will be accessible enough for owners to push wheelbarrows and gardening equipment across.

23. The Trap Ground Allotments are a valuable community resource in an area where many properties have been converted into flats or are without gardens. I would not like to think that Chiltern Rail's plans would make it more difficult for local residents to access the allotments.

### **Conclusion**

24. Constituents understand and accept that the effects of this proposal on their quality of life cannot be entirely mitigated. However, it would be helpful if Chiltern Rail could provide more robust and independent data on how this proposal will affect traffic, noise and air pollution. While some quality of life impacts are inevitable with the proposal, and some of those may be acceptable in return for major transport improvements, this proposal will have a significant effect on the quality of life of residents of North Oxford for decades to come and it is reasonable to expect that everything possible will be done to mitigate that impact for current and future generations.