

STATEMENT OF CASE
OF
ENGAGE OXFORD

In relation to the

Transport and Works Act 1992

Transport and Works (Applications and Objections Procedure)

The Chiltern Railways (Bicester to Oxford Improvements)

Public Inquiry

www.engage-oxford.org.uk

STATEMENT OF CASE

1. INTRODUCTION

Engage Oxford represents residents living on and close to the northern fringe of Oxford and Wolvercote. It has the sole aim of protecting them from the adverse effects of development proposals.

In our opinion the letter of objection from Oxford City Council (signed by a Council Officer without reference to Councillors) represents the view of the Council Planning Department and not the concerns of the residents of the City. Accordingly Engage Oxford invited the Board of Chiltern Railways to a public meeting on 25th March 2010, chaired by Dr Evan Harris MP. We are grateful to the Board for their participation. Approximately 150 members of the public attended the meeting. It became clear that much detailed analysis was not then available and many questions were left unresolved.

In general we support the opportunity to improve the transport infrastructure without simultaneously adding to pollution through noise, vibration and reduced air quality.

Our objection to the proposals by Chiltern Railways Limited arises from the fact that in its present form the finished scheme which is to be outside the control of the applicant, will cause significant but unnecessary pollution from noise, vibration, fumes and traffic congestion. Arrangements can be made and measures taken to make the proposed scheme a true asset to the community it is designed to serve. Should the Inspector be inclined to grant permission for the Proposal we would respectfully request that conditions be applied as set out below.

2. THE IMPACT OF NOISE

2.1 Passenger Trains

Chiltern Railways Limited have offered several suggestions for minor amelioration of noise, as applied to the track-bed or to their trains. The primary determinants of noise are speed and weight; and for any given set of measures the noise will increase with speed. This was acknowledged by Chiltern at the meeting of 25th March. In particular there have been no submissions concerning the shock

effects of two trains passing at speed. The paper produced by Chiltern Railways Limited dated 10 June 2010 proposed speeds for their planned services through the residential areas between Oxford Station and Water Eaton. It demonstrates that the time advantage gained by achieving these speeds is a little under 3 minutes, compared with a speed restricted to 30mph. We question the reasoning and also the necessity for the higher speed trains on this section.

We understand that there must be a balance struck between the commercial demands of the railway and the right to the quiet enjoyment of their properties (in gardens as well as homes) of many Oxford residents. The nature of housing has changed significantly since the Oxford-Bicester was reduced in operation in the early 1970s and since Oxford places reliance on its ability to maintain a balanced housing stock for its own working population, it is bad policy to threaten that housing with degradation in order to transport commuters into London. We argue that the impact of the proposed speeds is disproportionate and we petition the Inspector to impose a 30mph limit on all the track between Oxford Station and the proposed Water Eaton Parkway Station.

2.2. Freight Trains

We are given to understand that the operation of freight trains might become much more frequent on the proposed railway, particularly

during the times when passenger trains are not operating, i.e. mainly at night. Any permission granted as a result of this proposal will benefit all future schemes such as the East West Rail link to extend the Oxford to Bicester line through to Cambridge and the east coast sea freight terminals. We understand that the noise created by freight trains results from locomotives pulling long and heavy trains, old and noisy rolling stock and heavy axle loadings. We believe it is possible to grant permission for the current proposal subject to operating conditions, especially:

- Extra requirements for trains running on this line to inspect and if necessary repair their wheels in the same manner as that offered by Chiltern Railways Limited.
- Only modern rolling stock with light axle loadings should be used.
- Continuously welded rail is used throughout.
- There will be extra measures to screen high freight containers. These should be aesthetically pleasing.
- Restrictions to the number of trains running between midnight and 6am.
- Restrictions to limit shunting of trains to daylight hours.
- Prohibit the idling of stabled locomotives near residential areas.

2.3. Wolvercote School

Wolvercote School is adjacent to the railway line. The school is presently over-subscribed and has erected temporary class-rooms. Noise abatement that might be suitable for residential areas may not be sufficient to maintain a class-room environment. We ask the Inspector to ensure that special measures are taken to ensure noise mitigation for the school, possibly by using cut-and-cover tunnelling or similar.

2.4 Whistling

A benefit of the proposals will be the closure of open crossings and the corresponding reduction in a need for whistles. This does not apply to Wolvercote tunnel (right in front of the school mentioned in 2.3.). We ask for a restriction on whistling to apply to all trains, and for alternative safety measures to be put in place.

3. IMPACT OF VIBRATION

The ground in the Oxford flood plain contains deposits of gravel and clay in adjacent bands. Many property owners are familiar with the problems of foundations which sit across the two. In particular the clay bands move and transmit vibration according to the water content. Especially detailed analysis of the track-bed and foundations will be needed as conditions change over stretches of a few meters.

We have seen no specific proposals from Chiltern Railways Limited to address this challenge. Without careful construction we believe that vibration can affect properties many tens of meters from the track-bed (this is hearsay based on the experience of residents who lived close to the railway in the 1960s and early 1970s. We understand from long term local residents that heavy trains used to cause vibration as far as the Woodstock Road).

We are concerned that once a TWA has been granted, with insufficient protection to the residents of Oxford there would be little or no possibility of further measures being put in place to eliminate vibration from the railway.

4. AIR POLLUTION

We understand that all trains would be diesel hauled and that the possibility of electrification is not yet in sight. Professor Sir Muir Gray CBE DSc MD at the public meeting held on 25th March 2010 explained that long-term exposure to diesel particulates risks serious health problems. He has written separately to the enquiry.

We are particularly concerned about this as the Wolvercote Roundabout is already heavily polluted from cars and this is where road and railway converge. Air quality fails to meet WHO limits for air pollutants. The whole of Oxford has been designated an AQMA. Any increase in diesel train operations will exacerbate these problems. We ask that suitable mitigating actions be imposed such that the increase in train frequency does not cause any decrease in

air quality. We ask that particular attention is paid to the Wolvercote School playground.

5. ROAD CONGESTION

The proposed Water Eaton station is to be a major commuter station. Within the area to be acquired for the construction of the station, Chiltern Railways Limited have included a large amount of new car-parking spaces with the clear intention of attracting commuters predominantly by car.

Chiltern Railway Limited's prioritisation of car usage will cause an increase in road traffic which is unnecessary. The provision of new public transport through their proposal should be in tandem with measures to encourage the use of public transport to and from the railway stations, and we do not understand why Chiltern Railways Limited are not working closely with the local authorities and public service companies to replace car usage with more and better buses delivering and collecting from the stations to all parts of Oxford and the surrounding towns and villages.

The bus routes to and from the John Radcliffe Hospital receive a subsidy from the NHS, and we believe it would be appropriate for the railway companies to arrange suitable incentives to ensure that bus services mitigate the traffic impact.

6. OTHER POINTS

- We understand that all modern rolling stock is equipped with retention toilets. Can we have confirmation that this will be required of all stock using this line?
- The proposed works include the closing of the road bridge at First Turn. This is a main access to Wolvercote School for young children arriving by foot, scooter or cycle. The diversion via the Wolvercote roundabout is an extra 500m. Can we have confirmation that an alternative footpath will be provided during term-time?

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We support the improvements to rail services. We respectfully request the Inspector to make the following conditions if the scheme is to go ahead:

- Set speed limits of 30mph through Oxford's housing areas
- Impose axle weight limits on freight trains
- Impose night time restrictions on all trains
- Retain existing proposals to provide noise and vibration dampening measures as appropriate such as quiet track bed, noise barriers etc and provision for future independent monitoring and amelioration measures where and when required.
- Make provision for buses to access the station forecourt and provide pick up and drop off points adjacent to the station buildings.

DOCUMENTS

- A. Notes of the public meeting held on 25th March 2010 attended by Chiltern Railways Limited
- B. “Updating & Screening Assessment” dated July 2009 prepared by Oxford City Council
- C. Letter dated 3 August 2010 from ERM and Annex A
- D. East West Rail, “GRIP 4 Outline Business Case – Final Report – Non Technical Summary” published July 2010 by Atkins Limited
- E. Highways Agency – various letters, representations, statements, reports