



campaigning by  
The Railway Development  
Society Limited

Thames Valley Branch

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**SUPPORTER'S PROOF OF EVIDENCE**  
**ON BEHALF OF RAILFUTURE THAMES VALLEY BRANCH**

**THE CHILTERN RAILWAYS (BICESTER TO OXFORD IMPROVEMENTS)**  
**ORDER: TRANSPORT & WORKS ACT INQUIRY**

**INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Railfuture is a national voluntary organisation campaigning for improved rail services and promotion of the contribution rail can make to sustainable transport. In the Thames Valley we have several hundred members, together with the affiliation of most local Rail User Groups, including all those affected by this scheme. We are independent of the industry and trades unions, and always seek to put rail users first, be they freight or passengers.
- 1.2 I hold an MA from Cambridge University in Mechanical Sciences and am a Chartered Mechanical Engineer. Having been an engineer in the chemical and paint industries for thirty years, I now provide consultancy to the paint and cleaning products industries on transport matters. During the 1970s I represented my community with Greater Manchester Transport and British Railways about local rail and bus services. Later I was Chairman of Environmental Services at Wokingham Unitary Council with responsibility for transport and was on the South East Region Planning body (SERPLAN). Subsequently I represented environmental organisations on the Thames Valley Multi-Modal Study and the SE Regional Transport Board.

Since moving to Chipping Norton in 2007, I have been a regular user of both First Great Western and Chiltern Railways services to London and connecting bus services.

## RAILFUTURE'S POSITION IN RELATION TO THE SCHEME

### 2.1 Rail user benefits (local)

The scheme will offer an improved range and frequency of services from Oxford to London, often to a more convenient London terminal. It will open up opportunities for through travel to and from intermediate destinations in Buckinghamshire like High Wycombe, currently requiring car travel via the M40.

Oxford has a low modal choice for rail, the car and coach taking 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> place due to the location of the station to the west side of the City, away from the main centres of population. Water Eaton Parkway will open much more of the City and its environs sustainably to rail, some 30,000 people living within 1.2km. Although settlements along the A40 and A44 have direct bus services to Oxford station, which will also connect into the new service, Water Eaton will be of benefit to residents of west Oxfordshire villages, still having to use their cars because they do not have easy access to regular buses to Oxford or to Cotswold Line services. For signalling reasons west of Oxfordshire, it is not possible for Cotswold Line services to offer late evening departures (e.g. after theatres) from Paddington. The west Oxfordshire villages are therefore dependent upon access to the Chiltern Line or to Oxford itself.

The proposed terminal at Oxford station will be of benefit to disabled and elderly passengers, utilising a bay platform, avoiding the need to use the footbridge.

### 2.2 Rail user benefits (regional)

The scheme offers the benefit of a diversionary route to London from the west and Oxford. FGW services from the Cotswold Line and Oxford are and always will be very dependent on good running on the GW main line between Didcot and Paddington. Network Rail's GW RUS identifies, for example, in Figure 3.45 the serious delays to Cotswolds and Oxford services occurring at Didcot and Reading. I have had personal experience of problems with signalling and power failures at Didcot making me divert or cancel journeys. *[see SUP/14/7-8]*

This need will be thrown into sharp focus by the planned, albeit very welcome, upgrades to Reading Station (2015), Crossrail (2017) and possible Great Western electrification, along with the possibility of HS2 around Old Oak Common and Heathrow Airport. Bus substitution is seen by rail passengers as unacceptable during such important work, probably even more complex than upgrades to the West Coast Main Line. (The latter led to Network Rail paying delay attribution costs of £550M to operators).

Increased capacity between Oxford and London will lead to simple competitive benefits but more importantly will leave space for more freight trains between Didcot and Oxford, so critical for container and other traffic from Southampton to the Midlands and North.

### 2.3 Environment

The scheme will enable rail to be the mode of choice, for reasons set out above, for Oxford and will lead to reduced emissions and overall noise from main roads and motorways, and fewer accidents.

It is assumed by the promoters that 1000 journeys per day will be removed from the A34, but evidence from other railway re-openings suggests that this figure is conservative. Alloa, Ebbw Vale and Mansfield schemes suggest that objectives could be exceeded by 230%.

The recent August 2010 edition of “Oxon News” published by Oxfordshire County Council states that numbers travelling between Bicester and Oxford have soared by over 70% since extra trains were introduced in 2009 on weekdays, evenings and weekends, funded via OCC from developer contributions.

*[see SUP/14/14]*

### 2.4 Social integration

The proposed route passes through areas of significant wealth (e.g. central Oxford and central/west London), areas of mixed fortune (e.g. Kidlington and Bicester) and areas of higher unemployment (e.g. High Wycombe). Bicester is an area proposed for major growth in housing and Oxford and locations to its south (e.g. Culham) are centres for major technical innovation and growth.

Statistics published by the ONS for 2009 show an unemployment rate for Wycombe District of 6.4% out of a population of 163,600 with 3.2 Job Seekers per vacancy – equivalent figures for Oxford City, South Oxfordshire and West Oxfordshire are 5.4%/149,300/2.0; 4.3%/130,600/3.5 and 4.4%/102,500/1.7 respectively.

*[see SUP/14/3-6]*

The ‘connectivity’ between these diverse locations will be a major contributor to reducing the impact of unemployment and other features of deprivation.

### 2.5 East West Rail

This is a long-standing objective of Railfuture, as it would further improve connectivity between areas of growth and unemployment and open up further cross-country routes for freight. The proposed scheme does not prejudice East West Rail, indeed it would appear to be beneficial to it.

## CONSULTATION

- 3.1 We applaud the promoters' efforts to involve the various stakeholders. However, we should mention that Railfuture held an **independent public meeting** about the scheme in the Methodist Hall in Bicester on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2009. There was no bar on entry to objectors.

The meeting was well attended by in the region of 80 members of the public and at the end, on a show of hands, some 90% expressed support for the scheme.

*[see SUP/14/10]*

## FOOTPATHS AND LEVEL CROSSINGS

- 4.1 We note the concerns expressed by many objectors to the proposals to close or divert footpaths, which currently cross the railway between Oxford and Bicester, and the associated problems and heavy additional costs of proposals to replace level crossings with bridges.
- 4.2 In Chapter 11 of their Statement of Case, the promoters state that there is no option but to follow policies and standards laid down by the ORR and Network Rail to "*take all reasonable opportunities to remove or replace level crossings*". However, we believe that there should be individual solutions for individual locations, not blanket adoption of expensive rules. Replacement or closure of all the current footpath crossings cannot be justified, particularly those with acknowledged very low levels of usage
- 4.3 The line will continue to be single track and effectively straight where the majority of the crossings are located. There are more than adequate sight lines and no electric power lines are involved. At none of the locations will passengers be "rushing to catch a train". Rather than go to the expense of new footpaths and/or bridges, simple flashing lights and gate interlocks to warn of approaching trains should be sufficient in the majority of locations of purely pedestrian access.  
*[see SUP/14/11]*  
(There is a precedent at Downham Market station for not proceeding with an expensive bridge where a scheme has been scrapped at the behest of the local authority).  
*[see SUP/14/9]*
- 4.4 In paragraph 11.9 of their Statement of Case, the promoters state that the replacement of level crossings with bridges will reduce NR's maintenance costs. This may be true but it will require considerable additional up front capital expenditure. NR's costs could be covered by a contribution into a maintenance fund from part of the capital costs that would be saved by not building bridges.
- 4.5 We support the objections raised by various ramblers' groups and local parish councils to the inconvenience that would be created.

- 4.6 There are far more dangerous locations on the local highway network (e.g. on A41 and A44) where passengers have to cross high speed dual carriageways to reach bus stops. There are no proposals to build DDA compliant bridges.  
*[see SUP/14/12-13]*
- 4.7 Some of the money saved would be better spent on improving road safety and providing new bus links from villages to stations, along the lines of the very successful 'Railbuses' run by Oxfordshire CC in association with First Great Western to meet trains at Charlbury and Kingham stations and by Chiltern elsewhere. Blenheim Palace could also benefit from links to other existing tourist areas in Buckinghamshire.

Nigel Rose  
16<sup>th</sup> September 2010

**LIST OF ATTACHED DOCUMENTS**

SUP/14/3	Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics 2009	– Wycombe District
SUP/14/4	- ditto-	– Oxford City
SUP/14/5	- ditto-	– South Oxfordshire
SUP/14/6	- ditto-	– West Oxfordshire
SUP/14/7	Network Rail Great Western RUS Table 3.45	
SUP/14/8	Network Rail Table of Passenger Reactionary Delay Sections	
SUP/14/9	“A bridge too far” – article from Rail Magazine June 2010	
SUP/14/10	“Let’s go for it!” – article from Bicester Review July 2009	
SUP/14/11	Photographs of Level Crossings at Islip and Gosford/Water Eaton	
SUP/14/12	Photographs of A41 dual carriageway near Wendlebury bus stops	
SUP/14/13	Photographs of A44 dual carriageway near Yarnton & Begbroke bus stops	
SUP/14/14	Extract from “Oxon News” August 2010 – Oxfordshire County Council	