



campaigning by
The Railway Development
Society Limited

Thames Valley Branch

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SUPPORTER'S CLOSING SUBMISSION
ON BEHALF OF RAILFUTURE THAMES VALLEY BRANCH

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

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In our Proof of Evidence (*SUP/14/2*) prepared last September, we set out some of the permanent advantages for users of the local transport network along with its environmental benefits:
- Water Eaton station improving access to rail services for more of the population of north and west Oxfordshire, including better local bus links;
 - reduction in congestion on the A34 corridor;
 - improved frequency and reduced journey times between Bicester and Oxford;
 - economic and social benefits of linkages between towns in Buckinghamshire and employment growth areas in Oxfordshire
- 1.2 Since presenting this to the Inquiry on 4th November 2010, a number of events have occurred. These reinforce our arguments in favour of the proposal because of the benefits to the national rail network as a whole and the people who are dependent on it:
- announcement by the Secretary of State for Transport of electrification of the lines from Paddington via Reading to Oxford and Newbury;
 - experience of the diversions over the Christmas and New Year period because of the Reading blockade;
 - disruption on the line between Didcot and Paddington due to suicides and signalling problems;
 - confirmation of the construction programme for Crossrail;
 - announcement of potential route for HS2 near Paddington.

ELECTRIFICATION PLANS

- 2.1 We strongly welcome the government's plans for electrification of the lines from Paddington via Reading to Newbury and Oxford. This will benefit rail passengers

along this sector and will provide logical links with Crossrail. However, during the construction there will be inevitable disruption to the GW lines, necessitating diversions. Chiltern's proposal will provide an ideal diversion route for trains off the FGW main and Cotswold lines and options for direct Oxford-London journeys.

- 2.2 The proposed timing for implementation of the Chiltern scheme is an ideal fit as it would be up and running prior to the commencements of the electrification works.

DIVERSIONS DURING READING BLOCKADE

- 3.1 The upgrading of Reading station and its environs is necessitating blockades over the next 4-5 years. The first of these took place over the recent Christmas – New Year period and required trains from Bristol and South Wales to be diverted via Oxford and Banbury to reach Paddington. Although the diversions worked well and avoided passengers having to transfer to buses, nevertheless the journey time penalties were very long. Because of the reversal at Banbury, the time from Oxford to Paddington alone was around 2 hours. I personally experienced this on a through journey to Brussels. An equivalent diversion via the proposed link at Bicester would have no such time penalty.
- 3.2 Early implementation of the Bicester chord will minimise the number of Reading blockades requiring diversions via Banbury.

DISRUPTIONS ON LINE TO PADDINGTON

- 4.1 The GW mainline is one of the few in the country where there is no diversionary route to London, easy to set up in the case of disruption. Regrettably in the last two months there have been a number of incidents, which have completely blocked or seriously restricted the GW line into London – two suicides, for example, and a number of power signalling failures. On one occasion there was a total shutdown of the line for 2½ hours during rush hour.
- 4.2 There have also been examples of serious overcrowding from Oxford due to unavoidable train failures or cancellations of trains off the Cotswold line which otherwise should have gone through to Paddington.
- 4.3 Again the Bicester chord would have reduced the occasions of total shut down even if some delays would still have been inevitable. It will also provide the additional capacity needed to give headroom in case of problems such as those experienced recently and for the inevitable growth in the market.

ANNOUNCEMENTS RELATING TO CROSSRAIL AND HS2

- 5.1 The Government have confirmed the construction programme for Crossrail and announced the route for HS2, which will be consulted on later this year. Both will lead to further needs for diversionary routes en route to London, for which the proposed Bicester chord will make a vital contribution. Its timing is an excellent

fit, planned to be well up and running before significant construction impacts will be felt.

IMPACTS OF CROSSRAIL AND ELECTRIFICATION ON FINANCIAL CASE FOR BICESTER CHORD PROPOSAL

- 6.1 It has been suggested by others that electrification of the line from Oxford will make the Oxford-Marylebone scheme unnecessary or at least less financially viable. By reason of the network benefits set out above, the proposal will create a vital new part of the national infrastructure (and will also enable a further diversionary route for freight via East-West Rail link to the West Coast Main Line), which will be available during the phases of disruption.
- 6.2 Connectivity between Oxford and towns in Buckinghamshire is as important to the economy as is connection to London. Kidlington Parish Council recognise such economic benefits for a settlement even quite close to Oxford itself.
- 6.3 If in the longer term there are seen to be advantages of direct connections to Crossrail, it must be remembered that there is already a direct link from the Chiltern Line to Paddington. This is used by one Chiltern train a day and is also the diversion route being used during the Reading blockades. This link line will remain as a permanent part of the national network. In any case, Oxford and other passengers on the network will have 5 years of benefit during the disruptive construction programmes.

LEVEL CROSSINGS

- 7.1 As we made clear verbally during our presentation in November, we support the closure of footpath level crossings where there are serious safety risks on the national network, in particular Aristotle Lane.

CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The long term economic and network passenger benefits of the scheme are overwhelming.
- 8.2 The benefits of its use as a diversion route during construction works on the GW main line mean that it should be given the go-ahead as soon as possible, so that it is up and running in good time.

Nigel Rose
19th January 2011