

Chiltern Railway Inquiry

Closing Submission - Brian Davies

Introduction

I have serious concerns about the following aspects of Chiltern Railways' proposed scheme in the vicinity of the new Bicester Town station:

1. The way in which the traffic modelling has been conducted
2. The failure to account for increased traffic volumes generated by the extensive town centre re-development and the new Kingsmere housing development
3. The impact of the increased closure time at the London Road level crossing
4. Junction re-modelling at Station Approach and London Road
5. Revised bus stop and pedestrian crossing arrangements on London Road
6. The planned location of the new station
7. The refusal to consider the possibility of completing Gavray Drive in order to provide an alternative town centre route for traffic displaced from London Road

1. Traffic Modelling and Management

It is likely that a significant majority of the rail passengers destined for Bicester Town station will travel from the area south east of the station. Many rail passengers from other areas are likely to use Bicester North or the new Water Eaton station. Those passengers originating from the south east and parking their car at the station will therefore have to cross the London Road level crossing twice.

London Road is already a busy thoroughfare and the increased closure time of the level crossing will lead to queuing traffic for up to 50% of each hour during the day (please see table below). The typical level crossing closure times are quoted by Chiltern Railways as approximately 2-3 minutes for passenger trains depending on direction of travel and 2¹/₂ minutes for freight trains.

Train Type	Direction	Movements / Hour	Level Crossing Minutes	Closure Minutes
Chiltern	Northbound	2	2	4
Chiltern	Southbound	2	3	6
EWR	Northbound	2	2	4
EWR	Southbound	2	3	6
Cross Country	Northbound	1	2	2
Cross Country	Southbound	1	3	3
Freight	Northbound	1	2.5	2.5
Freight	Southbound	1	2.5	2.5
			Total Hourly Closure	30

I do not believe that the consequent disruption to traffic flows has been accurately modelled for. For instance, the period of time for which the crossing is closed may typically be 2 to 2¹/₂ minutes but time from the moment the lights start to flash through to traffic starting to move again and for it to dissipate could be significantly longer.

I do not believe that the disruption to the traffic flow on London Road caused by the re-modelled junction with Station Approach has been properly accounted for.

Whilst a 'global' estimate for traffic growth has been included in the modelling, this by definition does not take account of the extensive re-development of Bicester Town centre. The scheme includes a new Sainsbury's superstore, multiplex cinema and numerous smaller businesses, all of which will attract customers and therefore traffic to the town centre. The re-developed town centre will be significantly busier than it is now. For example there are two very small and old fashioned supermarkets and no cinema currently. I would suggest that very few of the existing supermarket customers travel in to the town specifically to shop there, so significant traffic growth is the likely result of the arrival of Sainsbury's.

Further evidence of the likely busy nature of the new line, including Railfreight traffic is found in an extract from the Chiltern Railways Statement of Case (CD/1.27):

3.35 The Secretary of State is funding the "DfT Specified Freight Robust Outputs" (ie the Phase 2A gauge enhancement works in Wolvercote Tunnel and elsewhere) which will be utilised if the East West Rail Link proceeds.

This suggests that the Government sees this project as an enabler to an enhanced rail freight network. This is likely therefore to lead to the generation of greater volumes of freight movements to and from the East Coast ports.

In document CD 2.24 (page 14, para. 4.17), a 30-38% decrease in traffic volume on London Road is forecast once the crossing is closed for 16 minutes in every hour.

- This figure does not take into account the limited alternative routes, especially given their already congested nature
- There are only two alternative routes between the A41 roundabout at the end of London Road and Bure Place in the centre of Bicester (a distance of 1 mile):
 1. Via Queens Avenue (excluding The Causeway, which is congested and unsuitable for anything other than light vehicles) – a distance of 1.9 miles
 2. Via the ring road and Launton Road – a distance of 3.1 miles

If as suggested, disruption to traffic at London Road is minimal, why is there a suggestion that drivers will seek alternative and significantly longer routes?

If this decrease does not happen, what will the effect be on the traffic flows on London Road?

2. New Bus stops on London Road

In document CRCL/P/8/B, Appendix PJT3, there are bus stops on London Road outside no's 36 and 29, as well as a new pedestrian crossing between the two. I do not believe the impact of these elements been included in the traffic modeling. It is reasonable to assume that with the development of the station, the number of bus services will increase and that, given the proximity of the stops to the level crossing, further traffic disruption is inevitable.

If the station is modeled to include the ability to run bus services via Station Approach and the Station Forecourt (CD/2.17, para. 5 page 6 refers) these stops are not needed. They will be only just over 200 metres from the new stops at the station.

3. Westholm Court and Station Approach

Traffic emerging from Westholm Court (a medium sized development of flats) opposite Station Approach will be impaired at any time when traffic is queuing due to level crossing closure and during the dispersal of queues.

Consideration must be given to the inclusion of Westholm Court in the re-modelled junction for Station Approach and London Road. A box junction or some other form of junction control is needed.

4. Gavray Drive

Gavray Drive was designed to link the ring-road with Launton Road, providing a much needed additional route into the town centre. It is currently truncated by the existing railway line at a point between Bicester Town station and the existing Birmingham to London railway line. With the planned re-development of this section of line an opportunity exists to complete this road as originally planned by putting an underpass in place. This would provide the only realistic alternative route for traffic displaced from London Road by the congestion caused by the level crossing. Further traffic will also be generated by the development of a new housing estate between Gavray Drive and the London to Birmingham railway line.

Chiltern Railways' concerns with drainage issues on this scheme relate to cost rather than practicality. If this opportunity is not realised, the option will be lost forever.

5. Station Options

In the Bicester Town Station Options Report (CD/2.17), one of the issues which led to Chiltern Railways' original 'Option 3' being dismissed was the siting of the car park on ground at risk of flooding.

It is possible to locate the car park alongside the railway line on the Talisman Business Park, adjacent to the platform on land that is not at risk of flooding (Ref: Environment Agency web-site). This would involve demolition of buildings on the Talisman Business Park but would negate the need for the same action on the McKay Estate. I believe that Chiltern Railways has dismissed this possibility purely on the grounds of cost. Other than cost, the existing infrastructure and the removal of traffic from the vicinity of the level crossing should make this a serious and attractive option. The Talisman Business Park junction on London Road has an existing substantial roundabout which would facilitate safe and easy access to an adjacent station.

Summary

I have significant concerns about the way in which it is planned to develop Bicester Town Station. My concerns are primarily regarding traffic management, the amount of time that the level crossing will be closed and the inevitable traffic disruption which that will cause.

London Road is the main traffic route into Bicester town centre and is also used by heavy goods vehicles accessing the trading estates on Launton Road. Given the close proximity of Langford Village to the town centre, London Road is also a busy pedestrian thoroughfare, particularly during rush hour periods.

The long awaited town centre re-development is now underway and will inevitably lead to increased traffic flows. Given the hinterland of the local towns, particularly Banbury, Oxford and Milton Keynes, it is likely that, as with rail passengers destined for the station, the majority of additional traffic generated by the re-development will enter the town centre along London Road.

Inevitably, almost all delivery vehicles destined for the town centre already use London Road and the volume of such vehicles will increase with the re-development.

My desire therefore is that the plan to build the new car park on the north side of the railway line is re-examined and that serious consideration is given to the possibility of locating the car-park on the south side. This will mean that:

- The majority of vehicles accessing the new car-park will not have to cross the railway line twice. This has the potential to avoid hundreds of vehicle crossings at the level crossing each day

- Access to the station at the existing Talisman Business Park roundabout could smooth traffic flows and reduce congestion
- The inevitable disruption caused by the increased closure time of the London Road level crossing will be diminished

Brian Davies – 25th February 2011