

News and views on Chiltern's proposed new Oxford to London route

CHILTERN LAUNCHES PLANS FOR NEW RAIL ROUTE

ECONOMIC GLOOM AND DOOM GAVE WAY TO A MORE OPTIMISTIC VISION FROM CHILTERN RAILWAYS WHEN THE COMPANY OFFICIALLY LAUNCHED ITS EVERGREEN 3 PROJECT.



As well as creating a new route from London to Oxford, this also includes upgrading the Chiltern main line between Birmingham Moor Street and London Marylebone. Evergreen 3, will mean a choice of rail routes for people living in the Oxford area, said Chiltern, and reduced journey times and a more convenient service for commuters between Bicester and Oxford.

Passengers on the Chiltern main line through Bicester North will also benefit from quicker journeys to London and the West Midlands.

Speaking at the launch ceremony on 15th January to an audience of user groups, councils and others with an interest in the scheme, Transport Secretary Lord Adonis said the £250m investment was good news for Britain and good news for public transport.

"This is the kind of innovation and service improvement I want to see across Britain, expanding dramatically the quality of services and expanding passenger numbers dramatically, and getting people out of their cars and onto trains," he said.

The scheme will be the first new rail link from London to a major city since 1910.

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PUBLIC INQUIRY IN THE AUTUMN

As expected, the Department of Transport has confirmed that the Evergreen 3 scheme will be subject to a Public Inquiry. While the date for the Inquiry has yet to be fixed, it is likely to take place in early October and will be held at a suitable venue in the Oxfordshire area.

The announcement of a Public Inquiry follows an official 42-day objections period which followed Chiltern's submission of the TWA Order Application and ended on the 17th February. Objections which cannot be resolved beforehand will be considered as part of the Public Inquiry.

The Inquiry will be chaired by an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport, allowing everyone involved to present their cases orally and to resolve issues within a structured framework. Some people, such as the scheme promoters and "statutory objectors" (e.g. landowners whose property might be subject to compulsory purchase) are automatically entitled to give evidence and to cross-examine other people. Anyone else can do so with the Inspector's permission.

Prior to the Inquiry both objectors and the scheme promoters must submit a "Statement of Case" setting out their arguments. These and any supporting "Proofs of Evidence" are then made available to everyone attending the Inquiry, to ensure there is focus on the main issues in dispute. There is no requirement to have legal representation at the Inquiry, and objectors are normally expected to meet their own costs.

"We have received a number of objections during the consultation period, ranging from land use to noise and vibration. Our aim is now to respond to all objectors, and reach agreement on as many of the outstanding issues as we can," commented Chiltern's Strategic Development Manager Allan Dare. "The number of objections received for Evergreen 3 have been fewer than would be expected for a transport schemes of this size. Also, we are pleased that many objectors have made it clear that whilst they are opposed to a particular issue they support the scheme overall.



CHILTERN LAUNCH

(CONTINUED FROM OVERLEAF)

Work on the existing main line between London, Bicester and Birmingham is already underway, whilst a Transport and Works Act (TWA) Order Application has been submitted for the Oxford route.

A centerpiece of the Oxford link will be Water Eaton Parkway station in North Oxford, a high quality transport hub, linked to key bus routes, the local cycleway, the A34 and the A40. The new station, located next to the existing bus park and ride terminus at Water Eaton, will provide a convenient service for train passengers wanting to travel into the city and out to London while also offering easy interchange with express buses linking with the city centre and to the John Radcliffe Hospital.

Chiltern Railways Chairman Adrian Shooter also welcomed the scheme. "This is the biggest passenger rail project for several generations not to call on the taxpayer for support," he said. "We will be working closely with Network Rail, who will be providing upfront funding that we will be reimbursing over a 30-year period." This deal demonstrates that real improvements to rail services can be paid for without public subsidy, by attracting people out of cars and onto trains."

Mr Shooter added that there would be no fare increases to pay for the scheme. Instead the improvements would be paid for by the extra revenue generated by more people travelling by rail.

FAST AND FREQUENT SERVICE

Evergreen 3 is designed to deliver new and faster journey times to and from a variety of destinations. Bicester, for example will get four or five trains an hour to London from its two stations, Bicester North and Bicester Town. Here are some examples of what could be in store for travellers:

Journey times

	Now (mins)	Planned (mins) *
Bicester-London	55 (fastest)	41
Bicester-Oxford	27	14
Water Eaton Parkway - London	No service	58
Oxford-High Wycombe	No service	38

Frequency off-peak

	Now	Planned *
Bicester-London	2 per hour from Bicester North	4-5 per hour in total from both Bicester stations
Bicester-Oxford	11 per day	Every 30 minutes
Water Eaton Parkway - London	No service	Every 30 minutes
Oxford-High Wycombe	No service	Every 30 minutes

* Planned timetable, subject to change



Bicester Village is popular with both UK and overseas visitors, many of whom will benefit from the new rail service.

SPOTLIGHT ON BICESTER VILLAGE



Trains are in fashion – certainly for a growing number of people visiting the acclaimed retail centre at Bicester Village. Those travelling from both London and Birmingham to seek out the latest designer wear include not only UK visitors but also growing numbers of international tourists. The Village is particularly popular with visitors from the far east – which explains why the station signs at Chiltern’s Bicester North station are in Japanese!

The relationship between Value Retail, which promotes Bicester Village and Chiltern Railways spans more than 12 years and has been an important part of attracting new visitors. Growth in rail travel for visitors to the Village continues to exceed all expectations. Figures for 2009 were 72% up on 2008 and follow a consistent upward trend of the last six years. These figures represent a growing number of visitors who are attracted by both the frequency and the efficiency of the rail service.

According to Miranda Markham, Value Retail’s Group Community Relations Manager, “The Evergreen 3 Project will greatly improve the rail offer for all visitors to the area, especially local commuters wishing to travel from Oxford and London.”

ON-TIME CHILTERN

Chiltern Railways has the lowest percentage of train delays in the UK according to a report showing the percentage of trains delayed between 1 April 2004 and 31 March 2009.

The information, published in the Times in February, showed that Chiltern had the lowest percentage of trains delayed

in the UK with 4.6% of trains arriving no more than five minutes late.

Thomas Ableman, Chiltern’s Marketing Director said: “Our passengers want good value, a great service and a train that arrives on time and that is what everyone at Chiltern strives to achieve everyday.”

TRACK RECORD OF INVESTMENT



Long rail franchises matter. Why? Because they allow operators to take the long view, investing in infrastructure and services to attract more customers and revenues.

This has been the case with Chiltern thanks to a unique 20-year franchise which the company was granted in 2002.

As far as Chiltern Railways is concerned, the length of the franchise – only Merseyrail has a longer franchise period in the UK – has been a green light for a series of investments which currently add up to £400m, even before the Evergreen 3 project.

These include 27 miles of track doubling, additional platforms at London Marylebone and Birmingham Moor Street, extensive additional signaling, and new park and ride stations at Warwick Parkway and Aylesbury Vale Parkway.

Evergreen 3 will undoubtedly enhance what has been a railway success story since Chiltern came into being following rail privatisation in 1996.

In fact Chiltern's success, which includes a 250% growth in traffic combined with high levels of punctuality and customer satisfaction, may well become a model for longer franchises in the future.

"The whole point about a longer franchise is that a company can get to know the area which it serves, understanding the economy, understanding the people, the communities and their interests," explained Chiltern Chairman Adrian Shooter at the launch of Evergreen 3.

Also speaking at the Evergreen 3 launch, Transport Minister Lord Adonis appeared to endorse this message when he highlighted "huge improvements in the transport infrastructure for Oxford" and particular benefit to the residents of north Oxford who had not had good rail connections in the past.

MANAGING OUR CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS

If Evergreen 3 gets the go ahead at Public Inquiry, construction along the Bicester to Oxford line could be underway during summer 2011.

What will this mean to local residents and commuters and how much disruption should they expect once the work starts?

The simple answer for local residents is perhaps much better than might be imagined. Working from east to west, the project will take one stretch of the line at a time with the work carried out during the daytime and on week days, except in extreme circumstances. Night-time and weekend work is of course expensive, so it is very much in Chiltern's interest to avoid this, as well as benefiting local residents.

24-hour helpline

"A lot of the work will be fairly low impact – for example replacing cables and fitting-out buildings – with little visibility to the public" explained Allan Dare, Chiltern's Strategic Development Manager.

"The whole upgrade of the line is likely to take around 12 months, but the time spent at any one location will be much less than this."

A Code of Construction Practice has been agreed with Chiltern's chosen contractors, and a 24-hour helpline will be in operation throughout the construction period.

Replacement service

Chiltern will take over the existing First Great Western service prior to closure and will run the existing 11 trains a day until the construction work begins. So as to carry out the work as quickly as possible, the Oxford to Bicester trains will then be suspended for up to nine months and a replacement bus service provided for commuters. This will be managed by Chiltern Railways and all rail tickets will be accepted.

Once the upgrade is finished there will be an immediate switch over to the new fast and frequent service.

EVERGREEN MARKS THE NEW RAILWAY ERA



An Oxford to Bletchley stone train with track repairs underway on the adjacent line.

The 1960s and '70s were challenging times for Britain's railways. Whilst Continental countries and Japan were investing heavily, closures and rationalisation were the order of the day in Britain. Dr. Beeching's infamous "axe" eliminated many lines completely; capacity on the remaining network was severely reduced; and this is only now being restored with schemes such as Evergreen 3.

Declining service

Following the withdrawal of Oxford-Bicester-Cambridge passenger services at the end of 1967, the line was only used for a declining number of freight trains. Track maintenance was reduced to the minimum and despite the best efforts of the local engineers the old-fashioned track quickly developed dips at the rail joints as the ballast degenerated and "wet spots" formed. In combination with the hand-braked, short-wheelbase wagons that were then the norm, this resulted in a lot of noise and vibration from passing trains.

In the early 1970s

the lines around Oxford area were re-equipped with modern colour-light signalling. As ever money was in short supply so in order to reduce the scheme's costs it was decided to "rationalise" the Bicester line. The few remaining freight trains did not justify retaining double track, so the line was singled. As was normal practice, the track that was in worst condition was lifted, which explains why the remaining line zig-zags in places, as the engineers sought to make best use of the remaining track.

On the right track

The result was an immediate reduction in noise and vibration, but this was solely due to eliminating poor-quality track and not, as is sometimes claimed, due to the reduced number of tracks.

The days when crude wagons bounced around at every rail joint are now long gone. Modern trains and track are designed to minimise noise and vibration and Project Evergreen will result in a very much better railway than that of 30+ years ago.

IN THE FIRING LINE



Chiltern Railways Chairman Adrian Shooter addresses the issue of train vibration.

1. Will the scheme lead to more vibration?

The Chiltern project will result in an increase in the number of passenger trains. These are all

relatively light weight and have air suspension, so the vibration effects will be minimal. Chiltern do not operate freight trains, but if and when the East-West Rail project goes ahead there may also be more freight trains on the line which will lead to an increase in perceived vibration.

2. What will be the impact on residents and businesses near the line?

We have carried out measurements in areas next to the line and these indicate that whilst some vibration will be perceived this will be very much less than the level which would impact on nearby buildings.

3. Can train vibration cause damage to buildings near the line?

This is very unlikely. There are many thousands of buildings next to railway lines throughout the UK but damage due to vibration from trains is virtually unknown. Typically the vibration levels that would cause cosmetic damage to structures are 50 times higher than those caused by trains. Also, much perceived vibration is air-borne rather than ground-borne so even if this causes the ornaments to rattle it has no effect on building structures.

4. What is Chiltern proposing to do about this issue?

We will be completely rebuilding the track structure which will help to minimise vibration. The project includes upgrading the track bed, laying new deep ballast and using modern, high-quality components throughout. The track will also be maintained to high standards for passenger trains whilst freight trains using the line will have modern wagons and sophisticated suspension systems to minimise vibration.

EVERGREEN 3 INFORMATION

Consultation and the Objection Submissions period have now closed. If you have any general queries, please check our website which has more information on the project as well as copies of the TWA application documents. www.chiltern-evergreen3.co.uk

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