



THAMES VALLEY

Thames Valley Branch Secretary
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By e-mail

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Dear Sirs

Oxfordshire Plan 2050

- I am writing on behalf of Railfuture* Thames Valley Branch to give our comments on certain aspects of your proposals. We thank you for the opportunity and would be pleased if you would take our comments into account as you take the Plan forward to the next stage.
- In view of our specific experience we wish to concentrate on transport issues. However, that is not to downplay all the other topics in the document which are so important for the future of the County and its residents and businesses.
- As the document is a spatial plan it is vitally important that transport and land use are considered together. It is disappointing that they appear to be being treated separately. Too often in the past, land use plans have been put in place and transport has then had to play "catch up", often with insufficient funding levered in from the developments. This has created situations where, despite protestations of policy in favour of public transport, walking and cycling, new residents are forced to use cars.
- Recent reports "Transport for New Homes" (Foundation for Integrated Transport) and "UK Housing: Fit for the Future?" (Committee on Climate Change) have listed past failures. The reports demonstrate the importance of locating developments along public transport corridors and the potential for new rail stations and light rail, tram and bus rapid transit routes to unlock housing development while mitigating transport impacts.

- This aligns with our own experience of re-opened or new rail lines in Scotland and Wales and, closer to home, the Oxford-Parkway-Bicester-Marylebone service, where passenger demand has significantly exceeded predictions.
- The CCC report stresses the importance of public transport being available from the day residents move in, not “when the 100th house is occupied” as is so often the case. Local authorities should borrow so that investment can be made in new fixed rail/rapid transit infrastructure or new or augmented bus services, the money being repaid from subsequent s.106 or CIL contributions. Bus service provision must be in perpetuity. This ensures people can make sustainable transport decisions before they choose location of housing or employment.
- Over the next 30 years there will be significant technological changes but unbelievable congestion would result if there were to be over dependence on self-driving vehicles.
- The first decade should give sufficient time to fully update and expand the local rail network, adding new stations to serve significant development areas, using borrowing as outlined in §6 above. Over the same period appropriate mass transit systems could be installed along corridors not currently served by rail.
- The Plan should assume that the following rail upgrades and extensions will be provided:
 - Cowley branch line and stations serving science parks etc
 - Completion of re-doubling of North Cotswold line
 - Hanborough station developed to provide a turn back and P&R
 - Completion of East-West Rail
 - 4-tracking between Didcot and Oxford
 - 4-tracking of complete route between Didcot and Swindon
 - Wantage-Grove Parkway station
 - Upgrades to Culham, Appleford and Radley stations and more frequent trains taking advantage of 4-tracking
 - Completion of electrification or alternative non-diesel traction
- Consideration could be given to upgrading stations along the Oxford-Banbury, Banbury-Bicester and at Islip if they would create opportunities for local development but only if a fit with other environmental and heritage constraints.
- The Oxford-Cambridge Expressway should not be considered as an inter-city “motorway” – that task will be delivered by East-West Rail. It should only consist of a number of local upgrades to existing ‘A’ roads, principally designed to provide links to stations on the railway.
- The main corridors not served by rail are along the A40 to Witney/Carterton and the A44 to Chipping Norton. Plans should be made for a rail or light rail/tram based system to serve Witney, sensibly utilising the track bed of the old railway as far as possible. The settlements along the A44 will have to continue to be served by bus but it can be assumed that growth in Chipping Norton will

fund improvements to service frequencies. However, if a location for further development, investment should be made to the A44 and roads into Oxford to provide bus priority along the whole route (e.g. bus controlled traffic lights at most junctions).

- Access to the Oxford hospitals is currently extremely difficult. Consideration should be given to a rapid transit guided system feeding direct into the north side of the JR from the A40 corridor, thereby creating a through route from Oxford Parkway station and the P&R.
- Potential Spatial Scenarios:
There is some scope for **intensifying city and town centres** but only if well connected to main business and employment areas by walking, cycling and public transport.
New Settlements should only be considered if well connected to a rail station or by other rapid transit to main business and employment areas (Eynsham garden village is at the margin of sustainability because of proximity to Hanborough station but should be linked to it by regular buses or on-demand “pods”).
Dispersal is inappropriate because it is not possible to provide sustainable public transport.
‘Wheel’ cluster appears beneficial in theory but sustainable public transport links between the outer towns avoiding Oxford will be difficult. Only Banbury and Bicester are linked by rail. The outer ring Banbury-Chipping Norton-Witney-Abingdon-Thame relies on rural single track roads.
Existing suburbs are unlikely to provide sufficient developments to meet needs.
Edges of larger settlements could deliver some of the requirements but only if there are no other constraints. However, care is needed to ensure public transport is secure. Developments around Banbury and Bicester are proving problematic in terms of bus provision.
Spoke and hub will concentrate too much on to Oxford city centre and could only work if rapid transit systems are installed along the main corridors into the City.
‘String’ and cluster settlements are most appropriate, provided all the settlements are along or have sustainable bus access to a rail or rapid transit corridor. Evidence shows that public transport is most cost effective when it can serve a number of residential areas along their routes.
- Our preference would be for a **string of settlements** along the upgraded rail corridors with additional stations where appropriate. We envisage all the stations being linked to ‘their’ settlements by high tech transport such as self-driving ‘pods’ or mini-buses and high quality dedicated cycle- and foot-ways.
- There could also be a string along the A40 corridor provided that a segregated fixed rapid transit system or a re-instated rail line is provided along the corridor.
- The up-graded rail links identified in §9 must be fully committed and funded (by borrowing as appropriate) before any plans are identified for the associated settlements along the respective routes.

We should be pleased if you would take all our comments into account but do come back to us if you require any clarification.

Yours sincerely,

A McCallum

Andrew McCallum, Branch Secretary

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