

OXFORDSHIRE

Waits to see what the ORCS will bring



Set to become an island: GWR's No 800022 at Oxford on 12 June 2019 with the 14.21 Paddington to Worcester Foregate Street service. A new platform face would be built on the right under the CP6 plans. **KEITH FENDER**

KEITH FENDER REPORTS ON A NEW STUDY THAT COULD HERALD FRESH INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTY

A multi-partner study is underway to evaluate how the rail network in Oxfordshire can support economic growth. The Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study (ORCS), which began in February, is backed up with £600,000 of funding from local and national government (the Department for Transport) plus East West Rail. All the train operators currently serving Oxford (Chiltern Railways, CrossCountry and Great Western Railway) are participating in the study.

EXTRA PLATFORMS

The ORCS project aims to build on the previous Oxford Corridor Improvement Scheme (p73, November 2018 issue).

Phase One of the Improvement Scheme saw two north-facing bay platforms, each able to accommodate a six-car Class 168 set, built in the former parcels dock area on the east side of the station. In addition, there were track and signalling enhancements north of the station, plus installation of three-aspect signals south of the station. Chiltern began using the bays for its service from Marylebone in December 2016.

Network Rail is currently developing a business case for Phase 2, for implementation in Control Period 6 (2019-24). This would see a new through platform face built on the western side of the existing down platform to make an island platform. Passive provision was made in the recent Oxford resignalling for this new platform face.

The work would require a youth hostel and a nursery to be relocated elsewhere to make space for the platform and track. A new western entrance to the station would be added as part of this work.

Phase 2 would include further signalling improvements north of

the city to increase train speeds through junctions. It would also include closure of three level crossings considered 'high risk', with two replaced by alternatives and the third completely closed.

Phase 2 is required to enable introduction of the additional services planned under East West Rail, with two trains an hour to/from Milton Keynes and a third serving Bedford envisaged, all terminating in Oxford.

A potential Phase 3 is being scoped for implementation in CP7 (2025 onwards) at the earliest. This would see one or both bay platforms on the up side being extended as through platforms, which would necessitate a comprehensive rebuilding of the existing station building (dating from the 1970s-1990s). A new station building is an Oxford City Council aspiration as the current building is now at capacity at peak times, with over eight million passengers annually, and it doesn't offer the best 'gateway' to the city. How such a new building might be funded remains under discussion, with private sector funding as part of wider development likely to be sought.

Phase 3 would probably come in the context of implementing some of the ORCS projects, such as reopening the Cowley branch to passengers.

In addition to all this is the question of electrification. A decision on wiring the line between Didcot and Oxford is

LAYOUT AT OXFORD

