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2018-10-18

Dear Mrs Foster,

Transport and Works Act 1992: Application for the proposed Network Rail (East West Rail Bicester to Bedford Improvements) Order

Further to your letter dated 12 September 2018, this Statement of Case follows our initial consultation response dated 2018-09-07 and has again been led by our Thames Valley branch who are now experiencing the benefits of the Western Section Phase 1.

Railfuture is the leading national independent voluntary organisation campaigning for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users in order to support economic growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities.

1 Introduction

1.1 Our lead author is Nigel D Rose, MA (Cantab), CEng, MIMechE of Wychwood House, 31 London Road, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire, OX7 5AX. He holds an MA from Cambridge University in Mechanical Sciences, and is a European Engineer, Chartered Engineer and Member of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers.

1.2 He was employed as an engineer in the chemical and paint industries for some thirty years. He then provided a consultancy service to the paint and cleaning products industries in matters related to transport, before retiring in 2013. In the 1970s he represented his local community in negotiations with Greater Manchester Transport and British Railways relating to local rail and bus services. In the late 1990s he was Chairman of Environmental Services at Wokingham District (Unitary) Council with responsibility for transport and represented the authority on the South East Region Planning body (SERPLAN). Subsequently he represented south-east environmental organisations as a member of the steering group of the Thames Valley Multi-Modal Study, at the Inquiry into the South East Regional Transport Strategy and as a member of the South East Regional Transport Board.

1.3 He presented supporting evidence on behalf of Railfuture at the TWA Inquiry in 2010 into the Chiltern Railways (Bicester to Oxford Improvements) Order.

1.4 Since moving to Chipping Norton in 2007, he has been a regular user of both Great Western Railway and Chiltern Railways services to London and intermediate stations, Cross Country services to the north and connecting bus services.

www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk
www.railwatch.org.uk

2 Railfuture's position in relation to the scheme

2.1 Rail user benefits (local)

2.1.1 The scheme will offer a range and frequency of services between the key economic growth centres of Oxford, Milton Keynes and Bedford. The intermediate stations will enable easy access for residents, many of them living in new housing built along the route, to employment in these and other important locations. It is vital that the railway is fully opened by the time these residents make their choice of employment and its location and do not have to restrict themselves to use of private cars. This also applies to self-employed professionals providing consultancy and design services to businesses along the corridor.

2.1.2 The Government have asked local authorities along the East-West corridor to establish ways of delivering 1,000,000 new homes by 2050. To this end a deal has already been struck with Oxfordshire County Council for the delivery of 100,000 by 2031. These figures demonstrate the importance of timely delivery of the railway improvements set out in this application.

2.2 Rail User Benefits (regional)

2.2.1 This proposed phase of East-West Rail will provide significant opportunities for connections with other rail routes and service extensions on to these. Examples include through journeys to the south and west via Oxford to Reading, Swindon and Bristol, providing connectivity with even more of the UK's economic growth areas. There is the further potential for through services to Heathrow Airport.

2.2.2 EWR will cross over and have connections with both the West Coast Main Line (WCML) and the Midland Main Line (MML). This creates the opportunity for further through services.

2.2.3 The proposal will lay vital foundations for the further extension of EWR to the growth area around Cambridge and creating further links to the East Coast Main Line, East Anglia and east coast ports.

2.3 Rail user benefits (national)

2.3.1 There are significant and growing freight movements, particularly inter-modal container traffic and motor cars, along the line through Oxford. These services are constrained by capacity on the lines to the north, particularly the single line section between Leamington Spa and Coventry. If there are any perturbations along this route, freight trains from Southampton Docks, for example, have to be diverted on routes across London, leading to significant delays and additional costs.

2.3.2 EWR will provide an ideal diversion route on to the WCML and MML and, once capacity on the line north of Oxford is fully utilised at all times of the day, a route for a share of this freight traffic. HS2 will also release capacity on the WCML for use by freight trains, giving further justification for EWR being used as a connection for north-south freight traffic.

2.3.3 EWR will also provide a diversion route for passenger trains (e.g. Cross-Country services) during engineering work. The benefits of a diversionary route have been demonstrated during the recent and on-going electrification and upgrading works on the GWML where trains between Didcot and Paddington have been able to be diverted via the newly opened Chiltern line via Oxford Parkway. Bus substitution is increasingly seen by rail passengers as unacceptable whilst such important work is carried out.

2.4 Environment

2.4.1 The scheme will enable rail to be the mode of choice, for the reasons set out above, for journeys between Oxford, Bicester, Milton Keynes and Bedford. This will lead to reduced emissions, overall noise in relation to sub-standard main roads, and numbers of accidents.

2.4.2 Recent railway re-openings have demonstrated growth far in excess of predictions (known to some as 'pessimism bias'). The Borders Railway is one such example and this growth is being achieved even before some of the associated housing developments have been built. The traffic growth on the new Chiltern Railways link via Oxford Parkway to Marylebone has been phenomenal. This route is understood to be delivering a quarter of Chiltern Railways' total revenue.

2.5 Social integration

2.5.1 The proposed route will connect areas of significant wealth (e.g. central Oxford), areas of mixed fortune (e.g. Kidlington and Bicester) and more rural areas currently with less easy access to high value jobs. Bicester is an area currently undergoing major growth in housing and additional housing growth is set to follow along the line to the east.

2.5.2 The 'connectivity' between these diverse locations will be a major contributor to equalising employment opportunities and improving the chances of local businesses finding the employees they need to continue growth.

3 Consultation

3.1 We applaud the promoters' efforts to involve the various stakeholders.

3.2 Every December Railfuture take part in a public event in Oxford Town Hall, displaying the opportunities for railway development across our sub-region. Without fail, every year we are asked questions about progress with the development of East West Rail and strong support is expressed for the scheme, it being seen universally as a transport priority because of the improved access it will create.

4 Bus services

4.1 Currently the only public transport along the corridor is the X5 bus service, operated by Stagecoach. It connects Oxford with Cambridge via Bicester, Buckingham and Milton Keynes. Typical journey times relating to this TWAO are Bedford-Oxford 2½ hours and Milton-Keynes to Oxford 1¼ hours. EWR will reduce these to 61 minutes and 41 minutes respectively.

5 Future-proofing

5.1 As already mentioned, the Oxford - Bicester scheme has shown that user demand is well above original forecasts. The same is likely to apply to this Phase 2. As such forecasting seems almost invariably to include an element of 'pessimism bias' we urge that passive provision be made in the Order for:

- ~ longer station platforms for increased passenger train capacity
- ~ increased frequency of services both for freight and for passengers
- ~ higher line-speeds for to achieve even more attractive journey-times
- ~ future electrification for wider network benefits, operational efficiencies and associated economic and environmental benefits.

5.2 We have witnessed too often the scale of economic growth unleashed by rail schemes leading to congestion and crowding and then the need for subsequent expensive disruptive upgrades, if those schemes have been built initially to a too-limited specification. Growing communities with a growing economy need a growing railway to support their aspirations for increasing opportunity and raising prosperity. This project must be future-proofed along its full length.

6 Documents

6.1 The following reference documents are attached/enclosed or will be available for reference at the inquiry:

- ~ 'Modern Railways' October 2018 article relating to growth of traffic on Chiltern Railways at Oxford Parkway, on pages 54-55
- ~ Stagecoach X5 bus timetable
- ~ Correspondence, summer 2018, between Kit Malthouse MP, Minister of State for Housing, and the Chairman of England's Economic Heartland

Yours faithfully,

Roger Blake BA, MRTPI (Rtd), MTPS
Railfuture
Director for Infrastructure & Networks
Vice-Chair, London & South East regional branch

Cc Network Rail (East West Rail Bicester to Bedford Improvements) Order,
c/o Winckworth Sherwood LLP, Minerva House, 5 Montague Close, London, SE1 9BB