railfuture

*Campaigning for better services
over a bigger rail network*

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Dear Sir / Madam,

Oxford-Milton Keynes Connectivity Study: call for evidence

Railfuture is Britain's leading, longest-established, national independent voluntary organisation campaigning exclusively for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users, to support economic (housing and productivity) growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities. We seek to influence decision makers at local, regional and national levels to implement pro-rail policies in transport and development planning.

Question One: What are the key themes for the study area?

What are the over-arching themes the connectivity study should look to consider when developing a package of potential measures? Please identify three themes you consider to be the most important.
These could include: • Decarbonisation • Accessibility • Safety • Levelling up • Access to public transport or walking and cycling provision • Digital connectivity • Environment

Theme 1: Decarbonisation. Front and centre of national and therefore regional policy agendas, highlighted by expectations in countdown to COP-26. "*Think global : act local*" acknowledges global challenge depends on cumulative local initiatives, such as transport in EEH. Rail is major contributor to decarbonisation through mode shift and fleet changes as electric road vehicles are not a complete solution (eg 'Oslo effect' particulates, congestion).

Theme 2: Accessibility. Transport connects communities and them with goods and services. Needs to be inclusive and accessible to all; 'levelling up' must mean addressing disparities.

Theme 3: Access to public transport or walking and cycling provision. Sequel to the above. Rail is central and needs 'first mile - last mile' connectivity, by healthy and environmentally-friendly means. We offer as a pointed example a specific observation on the implicit challenge posed by the data on station usage for the existing Marston Vale line in the new era of a EWR world. There is no point in thinking about the station locations in isolation – it is the combined journey, with Rail (or longer-distance Bus, or A.N.other in the centre) and options to get to / from the centre of the journey choice.

Take these together as a package, to give a greater market share even if the overall market for travel is reduced post-Covid (at least in the short term).

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

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Question Two: What do you consider to be the key movements in the area?

For example: • Based on your experience, what are the key journeys being made in the study area? • How are these journeys being made? Could they be made by a different mode of travel in the future (including virtually)? • Why are these journeys being made (employment, leisure etc)? • Are there gaps in connectivity which means that people cannot easy connect between key places?

Key movement 1: Between Oxford and its north-easterly catchment, notably Milton Keynes, and also locations beyond it further east including Bedford and Cambridge in particular.
How now / how future? Now: Private car including A421, A43 & A34. No rail provision. Buses limited and slow.
Future: Rail difficult without massive new construction, but EWR to Bletchley, and onwards via Bedford to Cambridge, will help.
Why? All purposes including employment, education + academic research, healthcare, retail, leisure including visiting family and friends.
Gaps? Rail non-existent for all this at present. The need for trains on EWR to run to / from destinations beyond the EWR spine is not sufficiently recognised eg Oxford – Northampton.

Key movement 2: Between Milton Keynes employment / training and leisure opportunities and Milton Keynes' own and surrounding areas' housing.
How now / how future? Now: Private car, buses and active travel; rail provision good from south and north, non-existent from west and limited from east (as only hourly and unreliable). Buses limited and slow.
Future: Opportunities to influence bus and rail design on existing Marston Vale Line, new east-north Bletchley rail chord.
Why? All purposes including employment, education, healthcare, retail, leisure including visiting friends and family.
Gaps? Rail services very limited.

Key movement 3: Oxford corridor (Didcot-Banbury) catchment area and beyond via Reading / Swindon and Leamington Spa respectively.
How now / how future? Now: Rail good in core corridor but weak within Oxford local catchment except towards Bicester. Strong local bus network centred on Oxford.
Future: Rail strengthened in core corridor with additional services, new Begbroke / Kidlington station, Hanborough hub, Cowley branch new services.
Why? All purposes including employment, education + academic research, healthcare, retail, leisure including visiting family and friends.
Gaps? Largest towns in Oxford's western catchment dependent for public transport on buses in congested A40 corridor.

Question Three: What are the key connectivity opportunities and challenges in the study area?

For example: • Where are the opportunities to improve connectivity (location specific)? • What types of opportunities and challenges exist? • Who do you think would benefit from improving connectivity in this area?

Connectivity improvement 1: East West Rail
Where? Didcot – Oxford – Milton Keynes – Northampton, including through services south towards Aylesbury and beyond eg via Rickmansworth to Watford Junction, and also between Milton Keynes and Cambridge via a new east-north Bletchley chord.

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What type? Rail – built to mainline standards, with electrification at the earliest opportunity and provision for freight.
Who benefits?
~ Rail users, who will have journey opportunities either not available or very difficult at present. People using connecting services (but limited opportunities at Bletchley); note need to provide for intermediate journeys, including interchanges with the intersecting other routes (ie WCML, hence need for Milton Keynes to be EWR-accessible east-facing as well as west-facing), and not just end-to-end journeys.
~ Road users, through modal shift from private car freeing road space and reducing congestion.
~ Local residents, through reduced noise, pollution, community severance from road traffic.
~ Businesses, through greater access to potential employees and customers.
~ Localities, through economic stimulus, agglomeration benefits.

Connectivity improvement 2: Oxford
Where? South-east Oxford including Oxford Science Park / Oxford Business Park.
What type? Restoration of passenger services to freight-only Cowley branch line.
Who benefits? Residents and businesses, existing and future, in south-east Oxford growth areas.

Connectivity improvement 3: West Oxfordshire
Where? A40 corridor: Eynsham / Salt Cross Garden Village – Witney – Carterton / RAF Brize Norton
What type? New mainline rail link for services into and beyond Oxford.
Who benefits?
~ Road users, through modal shift from private car freeing road space and reducing congestion.
~ Existing and incoming residents to housing growth planned for A40 corridor towns.

Question Four: What interventions do you think the study should consider?

The outcomes of the study will be a package of interventions to improve connectivity in the region. Are there any interventions you think should be considered during the development of the study?

Intervention 1: Rail, as outlined above.

Intervention 2: Light rail or equivalent in major centres (Oxford, Northampton, Milton Keynes. Perhaps using VLR technology (WMG Coventry). 'Last mile' etc, as well as local connectivity within the larger towns.

Intervention 3: Buses to fill gaps in rail network where rail interventions will never be viable: high-quality, accessible, bus priority measures, integrated fully with rail (including timetabling and good interchange at stations).

Yours faithfully,

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Railfuture
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