

## Three new rail lines in a decade is unprecedented' says campaign group

Oxford is preparing for months of disruption as a £161m improvement scheme for Oxford rail station gets under way.



The Botley Road will be closed at the rail bridge from April 11 until October as work continues to reroute utility cables and create a new western entrance to the station.

There will be more disruption in 2024 when the road is closed for a similar period and the rail bridge will be replaced.

Rail campaigners say they are aware of the disruption but look forward to the benefits that a revamped Oxford station will bring - 60 years on from branch line closures ordered in the Beeching Report.

Oxford could have three new rail routes by 2026, more than anywhere else in Britain.



The London Marylebone service started in 2016, making possible train journeys such as Oxford to High Wycombe and Princes Risborough for the first time since the 1960s.

East West Rail linking Oxford and Bicester with Bletchley and Milton Keynes is due to re-open by the end of 2024, and Oxford City Council recently committed £4.5m to a plan to re-open the Cowley branch to passenger trains by the end of 2026.

"Three new rail routes in a decade is unprecedented, and the two routes yet to come would not have been possible without the extra platform being built at Oxford station, and the replacement of the Botley Road bridge," said Dave Richardson, spokesman for the Thames Valley branch of national campaigning group Railfuture.

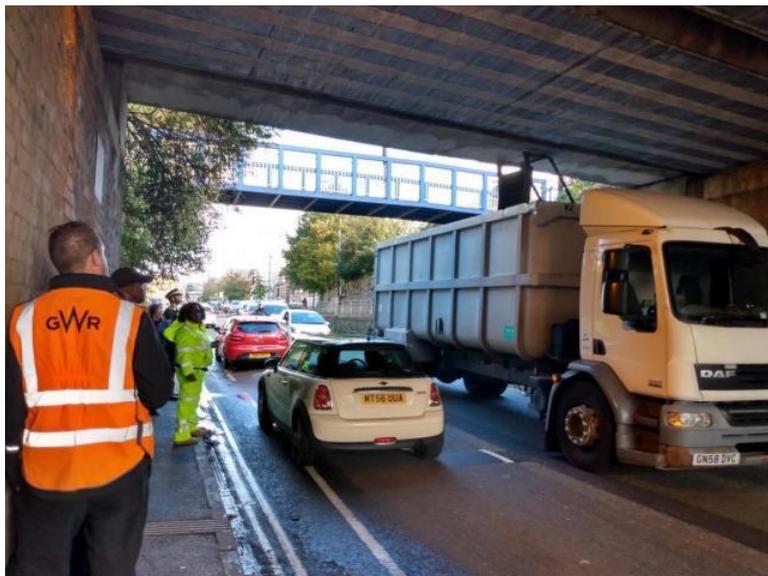


"People who never use the train might ask why all this disruption is needed, but better rail services mean less road traffic. Better use of rail services will help Britain towards its carbon reduction targets."

Mass closures of rail routes happened in the 1960s following the Beeching Report, which was published 60 years ago on 27 March 1963.

Some branch lines in Oxfordshire had already closed by then but more were to follow, and the Beeching Report also led to the closure of stations such as Kidlington and Wantage Road on main lines that remained open.

Mr Richardson added: "We need to be realistic about which routes might reopen, and most of them never will.



"But we can also press for new stations, and the campaign to reopen Wantage Road (as Wantage and Grove Parkway) is gathering pace because of major housing developments in the area.

"We are also supporting a group called Witney Oxford Transport which is calling for a railway or tramway along this route, and is winning support from many people. It's all very well to dismiss this as pie in the sky thinking, but traffic along the A40 is only going to get worse and we need to start planning now for the future.

"Sixty years ago when the Beeching Report was published, everyone thought the future was road transport. We now have congestion, pollution and need a more sustainable future, and rail is very much part of that."

For more information about how Oxfordshire lost some of its rail routes and the new routes to come, please contact Dave Richardson of Railfuture at: [davidrichardson2017@gmail.com](mailto:davidrichardson2017@gmail.com)