

East West Rail Consortium Strategic Board 16th March 2021

Agenda Item 8: Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study

Recommendation: It is recommended that the meeting:

- a) Welcome and endorse the output of the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study**
- b) Endorse the need for rail services operating to/from and through Oxford Station to be developed in a co-ordinated way in order to support the delivery of planned growth**
- c) Endorse the need to deliver enhanced rail connectivity between Oxford and Swindon, and onwards to Bristol**
- d) Endorse the need for enhanced rail connectivity between Oxford and the Midlands**
- e) Agree to support the Restoring Your Railway proposal in respect of the opening of Grove Station**

1. Context

- 1.1. East West Rail is a truly transformation project, not just in terms of creating new opportunities for rail travel, but as importantly serving as a catalyst for achieving a more fundamental step change in connectivity.
- 1.2. Given the geographical position of the Heartland within the UK the benefits of such a step change in connectivity will be felt across the UK. The rail system in Oxfordshire is a key component in the rail system supporting the region, and a key node in the national network. Unlocking the potential of the rail system within Oxfordshire is therefore as important as delivering East West Rail as a project.
- 1.3. It is in this context that both England's Economic Heartland and the East West Rail Consortium agreed to become funding shareholders in the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study.
- 1.4. The first phase of the study provided an overview of the rail network serving central Oxfordshire, with a particular focus on identifying the capacity and connectivity improvements considered necessary to support the delivery of planned growth.
- 1.5. At the same time, an additional piece of work examined the engineering feasibility and rail infrastructure requirements associated with re-opening the Cowley branch line. This branch line is open to freight services but the restoration of passenger services would potentially support existing activity around the eastern side of Oxford, as well as supporting planned growth.
- 1.6. The agreed objectives of the Study were to:
 - Establish the priorities for rail investment in Oxfordshire,
 - Demonstrate how prioritised rail investment can support the economy and development in Oxfordshire
 - Ensure the opportunities and benefits of proposed national rail investment (in particular the planned phases of East West Rail) can be secured.

- 1.7. The study has considered both passenger and freight services. For the former, it sets out an evidence base for how planned growth will require enhanced rail provision, in two main ways - increased **Capacity** requirements, in the form of additional carriages and, more significantly, better **Connectivity** between key rail hubs, using the measure of generalised journey time, a combination of on-board journey time, waiting time and connection time spent changing trains.

2. Study Outputs

- 2.1. Annex 1 provides a summary overview of the key outputs from the Study. Officers from Oxfordshire County Council will brief Consortium members on the details at the meeting
- 2.2. The work clearly demonstrates that an expanded rail offer has a critical role in supporting planned housing and employment growth in Oxfordshire. The proposals identified through the study are also a reflection of Oxford's central position as a major UK rail hub for inter-regional travel.
- 2.3. The Study further reinforces the strategic importance of the work being taken forward by Oxfordshire (supported by the East West Rail Consortium) to identify a long-term solution to the question of the crossing at London Road, Bicester.
- 2.4. The implications of this for the region, and indeed the UK, are significant and Consortium members will wish to reflect on how the development of the prospectus builds on the outputs of the Study.

3. Grove Station

- 3.1. The Consortium has previously identified the importance it attaches to ensuring that the benefits of East West Rail extend westwards towards Swindon, the South West and South Wales.
- 3.2. The Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study identifies the opening of a station at Grove as a priority. This proposal has been the subject of a bid to the latest round of Restoring Your Railway Ideas Fund. EEH as the STB has written in support of the bid.
- 3.3. The Consortium is invited to support the proposal to the Restoring Your Railway fund: if agreed this would take the form of a letter of support from the Chair.

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Programme Director

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