

Thames Valley Branch

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Mr James Gagg
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Infrastructure Strategy & Policy
County Hall
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By email: LTCP5@oxfordshire.gov.uk

27th April 2020

Dear Mr Gagg,

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL LOCAL TRANSPORT & CONNECTIVITY PLAN

I am writing on behalf of Railfuture* Thames Valley and wish to comment on the engagement activity relating to the above plan.

We welcome the broad principles behind the development of LTCP5 but are concerned about the lack of ambition in terms of what is delivered and how quickly.

The priorities must be climate change and air pollution/health. For transport, these will only be delivered by reductions in private car use and a change from fossil fuels to electric power.

The coronavirus pandemic must not be used as an excuse to slacken off on modal shift to public transport. Issues relating to the virus should be addressed by engineering design of buses and trains – protection of surfaces and operating crews, more generous seating spaces, size of vehicles and frequency of services to overcome overcrowding.

We now turn to some of the topic papers in more detail:

3: LCWIPs

We welcome the concept of joined up routes. Too often cycle routes have been developed piecemeal with sudden stop points, preventing safe access to final destinations. They also need to be considered multi-modally, with high quality secure cycle parking at bus stops (particularly in rural areas) and railway stations.

5: SHIFT

The principle of SHIFT is strongly welcomed and we are pleased to see the example of cycle parking at Didcot Parkway. Safe secure cycle parking is vital at bus stops and stations. However, why start SHIFT just

with a case study? It should be rolled out along all the major bus and rail routes (for example the A44 and Cotswold Line).

7: STRATEGIC ACTIVE TRAVEL NETWORK

Again the concept must be welcome. However, if it is to be developed across the County, care must be taken with the topography of the individual routes to ensure that “new” cyclists are not put off by hills or shared use in making connections with buses or trains. For example the road between Chipping Norton and Kingham Station is narrow and hilly in places – it would be ideal if some use could be made of the old railway track bed, whilst still achieving access from the location of the planned large housing development to the east of the town.

9: BUS STRATEGY

The main issues have been identified with the need for significant future investment. In terms of bus priority measures, in addition to bus lanes, the use of bus control of traffic lights should be adopted more widely. On demand/community transport may be appropriate in certain locations but service frequency is still critical if it is to be attractive to car drivers. There needs to be integration of timetables with rail services with enough redundancy to deal with late running trains. Thought should also be given to buses being painted in train company liveries to aid such integration and also provide publicity for the train services, particularly in view of the large numbers of new residents expected in the County. It will be beneficial to link the outer ring of towns as suggested in the 2050 proposals and not just concentrate on links to or via Oxford. An example might be Chipping Norton – Woodstock – Hanborough Station – Witney – Burford – The Wychwoods – Kingham Station – Chipping Norton linking several existing services together.

10: RAIL STRATEGY

The conclusions as to investment priorities are supported – in particular the Cowley branch line, Hanborough, Grove/Wantage, Didcot-Oxford enhancement and Begbroke. Completion of electrification to Oxford and also on East West Rail is vital if the County is to meet climate change obligations. Overall the programme lacks ambition in terms of timing. New stations and other enhancements must be in place before houses are built or new business developments are open – the example of Aylesbury Vale Parkway should be followed. In view of the importance of Oxfordshire to the UK economy, the County should use its influence with DfT, Network Rail and the Treasury to expedite these vital rail investments.

11. PARK & RIDE

The points about new P&R sites being further out from Oxford City and as transport interchanges are well made. It is important that bus services from all P&R sites do not just go to the City centre but also to other major employment locations and at all the times and frequencies employees need to get to and from them. Railway stations (existing and proposed) should also be considered as P&R sites and interchanges.

12. CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Delivering on measures to reduce climate change must be a priority for the Plan. These will only be delivered by reductions in private car use and a change from fossil fuels to electric power. Building on the list of current actions is to be welcomed. Rail electrification including on East West Rail should be added to the list.

13. AIR QUALITY

Combating air pollution must go hand in hand with climate actions as many of the solutions are similar. A major source of pollution are Heavy Goods Vehicles. Every effort must be made to transfer freight to electrified rail lines by enabling rail connected transfer hubs where the final distribution can be by smaller electric vehicles. Where there is no rail alternative, HGVs should in any case be prohibited in town and village centres.

16. CONNECTING OXFORD

The proposals, particularly the Parking Levy, are to be welcomed as they will facilitate modal shift and provide funding for vital investments including on the local rail network and sustainable links thereto. It has to be hoped that over time the example of Nottingham can be delivered in Oxfordshire.

18. TRANSPORT CORRIDOR CONNECTIVITY

The general approach is to be welcomed as is the suggestion of a new station at Grove/Wantage. The latter should be implemented much more quickly than the timetable suggested in the Rail Strategy. Swindon-Oxford rail services would be very welcome. The North Cotswold railway line should be added to the list of corridors and could enable housing and other developments to be diverted from other less sustainable locations. Hanborough Station is key to much of this. The County should use its influence with DfT and Network Rail to expedite these actions. We would welcome the approach adopted for the A420 being applied to all the other identified corridors but not restricting the routes to Oxford City but to other important destinations – hospitals and medical research, science hubs etc. With respect to the A40 between Oxford and Witney/Carterton consideration should be given to reusing the old railway track bed for a rapid transit route – trams, guided bus or heavy rail – to bypass the congestion on the A40 itself.

19. REGIONAL TRANSPORT NETWORK

The link to Cambridge is important for the interchange of science research etc but East West Rail should be the main solution. We welcome the County's opposition to the suggested Expressway as it would go against Climate Change policies. Any minor road investment in the corridor should just be to provide links to East West Rail stations. There should be early investment in electrification of EWR as well as appropriate provision of additional facilities for freight trains to provide the necessary long term robustness for all south-north freight movements. Every effort should be made to divert HGV traffic using the A34 on to rail.

23. NETWORK MANAGEMENT & COORDINATION

We welcome the main ideas – signage, traffic light priority for buses, routing of HGVs away from residential areas, electric vehicle charging points in all new developments, etc – but enforcement is vital. We particularly endorse signing opportunities for sustainable travel from particular locations, journey times, etc.

25. FREIGHT STRATEGY

The main issues relating to freight have been identified but we are concerned that there is an insufficient action plan to transfer more freight from road to rail, particularly new interchanges to permit transfers from freight trains to local deliveries by road vehicles smaller than HGVs, therefore permitting electric transmission. There needs to be increased investment along EWR for freight trains, for example the provision of freight loops permitting extra paths for all south-north rail traffic instead of HGVs on the A34.

26. A SMART COUNTY

We particularly support the references under freight delivery and new developments. For the latter, as well as future proofing all new housing, it is vital that under the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 they are built in sustainable locations, close to existing and future railway stations. It will also be appropriate to ensure that tourist destinations are easily accessible by walking and cycling and by bus from rail stations and are well advertised. A good exemplar is Blenheim Palace by the S3 bus from Oxford Rail station and by the 7 and 500 from Oxford Parkway although more publicity on trains would be appropriate.

We should be pleased if you would take on board our comments and incorporate them into the final Plan going out for formal consultation later in the year.

Please come back to us if you need further clarification on the points we have raised.

This response has been researched and prepared by our committee member, Nigel Rose.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Stow

Richard Stow,

Chairman

** Railfuture is a national voluntary organisation, campaigning for improved rail services and promotion of the contribution rail can make to sustainable transport. In the Thames Valley we have several hundred members, including the affiliation of most local Rail User Groups. We are independent of the industry, political parties and trades unions, and always seek to put rail users first, be they freight or passengers.*

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