



Oxford North Junction: a Great Western Railway Intercity Express Train approaches the university city on 30 October 2019 with the 11.00 Great Malvern to Paddington service. Ken Brunt

# OXFORDSHIRE CONNECT PROGRESSED

## FOUR-TRACKING, GRADE SEPARATION AND EXTRA PLATFORM AT OXFORD EXAMINED

**FURTHER EXAMINATION** of capacity improvements in the Oxford area is to be progressed under the banner of Oxfordshire Connect.

The work builds on the previous Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study (ORCS – p70, August 2019 issue), which initially studied the rail network and identified high level interventions which may be required to deliver an enhanced train service. A second stage of work has since been completed with more detailed analysis of the scale and cost of interventions. Oxfordshire Connect will now seek to create a comprehensive investment programme covering all schemes, and the project has entered the Department for Transport's Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline.

Oxfordshire Connect contains three specific areas of focus. A study of the potential for reopening the Cowley branch line was carried out within the first stage of ORCS, with the intention of Chiltern Railways' services from London Marylebone being extended across the city. Capital costs were estimated at between £29 and £53 million depending on the level of enhancements provided, with a likely reopening date of 2028. The branch would serve two new stations, at Oxford Business Park and Oxford Science Park.

The other two elements were studied in detail in the second stage of ORCS. The first covers the 'core' rail network through Oxford, from the junction with the North Cotswold line at Wolvercot North Junction to Appleford, north of Didcot. Here the plan would be to deliver four-tracking south of Oxford station and an additional through platform at the station on the east side by conversion of one of the north-facing bays, which

would in turn require construction of a new station building as envisaged in the Oxford station masterplan. The estimated cost of this element is between £675 and £900 million, the bulk of which is attributed to the four-tracking and additional platform. Four-tracking of the section between the station and Hinksey North Junction is identified as the most challenging element to deliver.

The other study covered Didcot to Highworth Junction, east of Swindon, including the junctions to the north and east of Didcot. This is costed at between £1.6 and £2.1 billion, with the most significant interventions being grade separation of Didcot East Junction and four-tracking between Wantage Road and Steventon. The site of the former Wantage Road station is recommended as the location for a new Grove station, other sites being deemed unsuitable.

In addition to the Cowley services, enhancements are likely to include extension of East West Rail services south of Oxford, additional Oxford to Birmingham trains and improvements at Culham. The project would also tie in with enhanced services on the North Cotswold line proposed by the North Cotswold line task force (p78, August 2020 issue), which is

seeking a four trains per hour service between Oxford and Hanborough (two coming from London and two from Didcot). This would

additionally require double-tracking between Wolvercot North Junction and Hanborough and a second platform at Hanborough station.



### WITNEY REOPENING CASE SUBMITTED

An application to progress work on a rail link between Witney and Oxford has been submitted to the latest round of the Government's Restoring your Railway Fund.

The plan has been developed by the Witney Oxford Transport Group, which is targeting a Carterton – Witney – Eynsham – Oxford link. The deadline for applications in the third round of the Restoring your Railway

competition was 5 March. So far 25 projects have received support to develop business cases through the 'Ideas Fund' element of the scheme.

A staged approach to reopening is proposed by the group. Initially services would run to a new Park and Ride station near Yarnton Junction, in part utilising old track. An extension would then continue to Eynsham, mostly on a former trackbed, before

a third phase would run to Witney. Given the old station yard here has been demolished, a Park and Ride station is proposed on the western side of the town, close to a new housing estate. A final fourth phase would extend to Carterton. The group suggests the journey time from Carterton to Oxford by rail would be 22 minutes, compared to more than an hour by bus.