# Railfuture Thames Valley regional branch response to Oxfordshire County Council's OxRail 2040: Plan for Rail

1. *I am responding to this survey as:* a representative of a group or organisation.

2. *Please give the name of the group/organisation you represent:* Railfuture.

3. *Which of these describes how you mainly get around Oxfordshire, day to day?* All (across our Oxfordshire members).

**Our vision for rail in Oxfordshire**

4. *Please indicate to what extent you support or oppose the plan's vision:* Strongly support.

5. *Please use the box below if you would you like to tell us a bit more about your answer to this question:* Endorse the 4-part vision – continued economic pre-eminence, planned homes and jobs growth, socio-economic inclusivity, environmental sustainability.

**Theme: Improving connectivity and enhancing infrastructure**

6. *Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with current rail connectivity across Oxfordshire?* Dissatisfied.

7. *Please use the box below if you would you like to tell us a bit more about your answer to this question:* Insufficiently frequent and consistent level of service across the network and throughout the week, and substantial existing and growing communities in the south-west quadrant of the county (Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire) being rail-disenfranchised without their own stations within easy reach.

8. *Please indicate how important or unimportant you feel it is to connect and co-ordinate rail, bus, cycling and pedestrian travel in Oxfordshire:* Very important.

9. *Please use the box below if you would you like to tell us a bit more about your answer to this question:* Integrated transport planning considers whole, door-to-door, journeys. Regarding bus/rail connections, the Council should engage with bus operators to ensure that these services, especially those serving more rural areas, continue to run into the evenings for the benefit of shift workers and residents returning after an evening out in Oxford or elsewhere.

10. *Would an improved rail service (e.g. new and improved stations and better and more frequent trains with more passenger capacity) encourage you to use rail more often for commuting, leisure or business?* Yes.

11. *Please use the box below if you would you like to tell us a bit more about your answer to this question:* Rail to become the default mode choice.

**Theme: Climate action**

12. *Please indicate important or unimportant you feel rail's role is in helping Oxfordshire tackle climate change?* Important.

13. *Please use the box below if you would you like to tell us a bit more about your answer to this question:* Rail's single most effective contribution is through mode shift.

14. *Please indicate how concerned or unconcerned you are about the environmental impact of the existing railway? (e.g. use of diesel trains, air quality, noise pollution etc.)* Very concerned.

15. *Please use the box below if you would you like to tell us a bit more about your answer to this question:* Use of diesel has negative energy security as well as air quality implications especially in urban areas, while noise pollution is a quality of life / well-being consideration.

**Theme: Rail as Placeshaper**

16. *Please indicate whether you agree or disagree that rail can help shape more connected communities that cater for everyone in Oxfordshire?* Strongly agree.

17. *Please use the box below if you would you like to tell us a bit more about your answer to this question:* Network Rail's Wales and Western Region 2024 report "Connecting Communities: framework assessment of new station opportunities on Western Route" examined settlement or population clusters where the total population within a connected settlement cluster living more than 5km (3 miles) away from a railway station was greater than 10,000 people. Of the hundreds of clusters identified nationally 29 are on, or closest to the infrastructure of, Western Route. Six, including the Cowley branch line, were not considered further as already subject to advanced business case development or had recently been subject to detailed industry-led business case development. Of the other 23, three are in Oxfordshire - the 2nd-highest by national cluster size rank is Witney (19th), followed by Carterton (45th) and Wantage/Grove (82nd). In the overall assessment of feasibility (a combination of strategic fit and complexity) of the 23, Witney ranked 8th, Wantage 9th, and Carterton 21st. Carterton is ranked 4th-equal and Witney 6th for strategic fit, Wantage 19th. Wantage and Witney share 8th place in the combined rank as, unlike Witney, Wantage has the benefit of location on an existing line; Carterton is in 21st place. As the report itself notes, however: "Carterton presents an interesting case. Its strategic case score is among the highest, but it scores lowest in likely complexity (i.e. it is the most complex of all opportunities studied). This reflects the need for a long section of new railway and a new service. It should be noted that the proposal for Carterton includes a station at Witney (a separately identified cluster) so the Carterton strategic case and likely complexity scores include Witney." It is noteworthy that these three places have <u>not</u> been excluded, as have others, on this basis: "Clusters which may be expected to have a strong case for a new station in future but do not currently, for example where significant housing or employment growth is allocated or proposed." In summary, Network Rail has clearly identified Wantage and Witney-Carterton as meriting their own new mainline stations.

18. *Please indicate how important or unimportant you believe it is that Oxfordshire's stations become interchange points with better public spaces, improved accessibility, and a clear local identity?* Very important.

19. *Please use the box below if you would you like to tell us a bit more about your answer to this question:* The concept of community hubs, not just transport interchanges.

20. *Please indicate to what extent you support or oppose our four priorities described on pages 10-14 of the Summary report for consultation.* Strongly support all four.

21. *Please use the box below if you would you like to tell us a bit more about your answer to this question:* In recognition of Railfuture's early support in establishing the Witney Oxford Transport Group back in 2013, the fourth priority - 'Proposed new stations' - must also include an explicit commitment in Phase 1 to consider 'new stations to support growth' for Eynsham / Salt Cross, Witney and Carterton as integral to 'Building rail-connected communities / Connecting West Oxfordshire.'

22. *Please indicate to what extent you support or oppose the Plan's phasing shown on pages 16-21 of the Summary report for consultation:* Support.

23. *Would you like to tell us a bit more about your answer to this question?*
The principle of phasing can add structure and sequence to reinforce priority activity, even if circumstances outside the authority's control or even influence will vary what is the current best estimate of timescales.

24. *Please use the box below to tell us any other thoughts or suggestions that you have about the future of rail in Oxfordshire, and how it can support communities, the environment and the economy:* The future of rail in Oxfordshire, and its role in supporting communities, the environment and the economy is clearly

strengthened by a 15-year Plan for Rail at a time of multiple institutional and policy changes, positioning the authority as equipped - across a period of uncertainty - to respond to challenges and grasp opportunities. Considering the importance of increased capacity on the very busy line through Oxford and bearing in mind that every single proposal in the Plan is dependent on such capacity, save only the potential new station at Ardley, we consider it vital to keep the number of trains terminating at Oxford to a minimum to reduce platform occupation.  The Council should therefore seek to ensure that passenger services to / from the EWR route should extend to / from Didcot and / or Bristol thus also increasing frequencies and improving connectivity on these routes.

**About you**

25.  *What is your age?* Prefer not to say (not applicable for an organisation response).

26.  *What is your sex?* Prefer not to say (not applicable for an organisation response).

27.  *What is your postcode?* OX16 1.

28.  *What is your connection to Oxfordshire?  (Please tick all that apply)* Most of our members live in Oxfordshire.

29.  *What is your ethnic group or background?* Prefer not to say (not applicable for an organisation response).

30.  *Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a long-term illness, health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?*  (not applicable for an organisation response).

31.  *Would you like to find out more about what's happening in Oxfordshire?* (not applicable for an organisation response).

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