

Public speakers

24 November 2020

OXFORDSHIRE

G R O W T H B O A R D

Question

1. Ian Ashley on behalf of Need not Greed Oxfordshire

NNGO notes that work is ongoing to refine policy options for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. The description (Para 12) makes it sound as if there are a wide range of partners involved, but as far as we can see this is all related to different internal groupings within the local authorities. Given the long-term strategic importance of the Plan to the future of Oxfordshire, we are sure that all involved would wish to avoid the usual confrontational process where critical decisions are made behind the scenes and the public only get to tick a box (or not) at the end. At the start of the Plan preparation, there was considerable discussion about the comprehensive involvement of external informed stakeholders, such as NNGO and CPRE, at early stages in the process. How does the Growth Board therefore intend to test its internal assumptions and draft policy options with such stakeholders / critical friends prior to formal consultation?

2. Charlie Maynard on behalf of the Witney to Oxford Transport Group

Thank you all for allowing me to present to you today. I am the newly elected Chair of the Witney Oxford Transport Group (“WOT Group”) and am speaking to you in that capacity. WOT Group is a not-for-profit, non-political, voluntary organisation. We have been busy over the last few months. Please see the link [here](#) for a Google Earth presentation outlining a rail route from a junction with the Cotswold Line at Yarnton, through Eynsham and Witney, to Carterton and RAF Brize Norton. We believe the presentation clearly demonstrates that there is indeed a feasible route for the railway line which would generate very large economic, social and environmental benefits for West Oxfordshire. Importantly, this route closely follows the A40 and therefore minimises the impact both to people’s homes and to our countryside. Prior studies have looked at reinstating the old route, which is not a viable option.

We are now working hard on quantifying the costs of such a line and would like to report back to you shortly on this point. We will soon be applying for a grant from the Department for Transport’s Restoring your Railway [Ideas Fund](#). The application requires the sponsorship of one MP. The line runs through two constituencies. We have the support of Layla Moran; Robert Courts is considering. At Oxfordshire County Council’s November 3rd meeting, every single councillor present, save one abstention, voted in support of a motion committing to “undertake a feasibility study, should funding be confirmed, in the next financial year, to look at a rail link from Carterton, Witney and Eynsham to Oxford”.

We have recently received letters of support from Carterton Town Council and the Lord Mayor of Oxford and we are hopeful that we will soon have similar letters to Witney Town Council and Eynsham Parish Council. We will be seeking to submit a cross-party motion similar to that submitted to OCC to WODC’s next full council meeting on January 20th. We will also be conducting a community outreach and consultation programme in the first quarter of 2021.

The proposed work to increase rail capacity at Oxford Station and the dual tracking to Hanborough are both critical enabling steps for this next step of building a railway to Carterton and we fully support both plans.

We all know how troubled West Oxfordshire's transport situation is and we are trying our best to contribute to the solution. We have two requests to each of you today:

- 1) Please have a look through our presentation. If you have questions or comments, we are very keen to hear them.
- 2) We ask for your support in exploring this opportunity further, including giving your support for a Feasibility Study. Importantly, we recognise that giving your support to a Feasibility Study is not the same as giving your support to rebuild the railway line. We stress that we are only looking now for your support on the former, not the latter.

3. Cllr Liz Leffman, Oxfordshire County Council

I am addressing the Growth Board as County Councillor for Charlbury and Wychwood. I would first of all like to say how pleased I am to see this paper and the draft letter that accompanies it. I strongly support the plans outlined in this paper and look forward to a successful outcome to the funding bid for Phase 2.

The North Cotswold line runs through the ward that I represent, and there are five stations in it: Finstock, Charlbury, Ascott under Wychwood, Shipton under Wychwood and Kingham. Only two of these stations, Charlbury and Kingham, have an hourly service and all trains currently stop at these stations. The other stations have just one train per day in either direction. Traffic on this line is limited because some sections of the line are still single track: the sections between Hanborough and Oxford, Hanborough and Charlbury, and Evesham and Pershore. The plan is that the sections between Hanborough and Oxford and Evesham and Pershore are doubled as part of the upgrade referred to in this paper – a total of nine miles. But as far as I can ascertain, there are currently no plans to double the section between Hanborough and Charlbury. This will severely limit the overall capacity of the line.

The upgrade of the section between Hanborough and Oxford means there will be four trains per hour from Hanborough to London as compared with one per hour at present. But because of the restriction on capacity caused by single track elsewhere on the line, and in order to improve the service from further up, under present plans Kingham and Charlbury stations would no longer form part of the core daily service and a limited number of trains will stop at these stations once the Hanborough upgrade is completed. Both Charlbury and Kingham are well-used: Charlbury served around 300,000 passengers per year prior to the pandemic. It should be noted that passenger numbers dropped slightly following the opening of Oxford Parkway station in 2016. The number of passengers using that station have grown steadily since its opening and that is because it offers two trains per hour to London as compared with just one on the Cotswold Line. This serves to demonstrate that if the frequency of trains stopping at Kingham and Charlbury is reduced, it is likely that people will drive to Oxford Parkway or Hanborough to catch a train to London. This undermines the intention of this strategy which is to provide county-wide rail connectivity which will encourage people to use their cars less.

I am therefore asking the Chair of the Growth Board to consider revising her letter to the Government to include reference to the North Cotswold Line, to emphasise the importance of doubling this line and to request confirmation that the doubling of the line along its entire length will be included in plans for Phase 3.