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Via Email to: [OxRAIL2040@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:OxRAIL2040@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

30<sup>th</sup> September 2025

Dear OxRail, 2040,

### **OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail**

On behalf of the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC) membership, we are pleased to have the invitation and opportunity to respond to OxRail 2040 the County Council's 15-year Plan for Rail.

The following has been developed in consultation with selected members of the TVCC, most particularly those with specific interest in rail, transportation, and its impact in driving the economy. For your information, we have also shared the consultation with our wider membership and invited their direct submission of individual responses.

TVCC are the Accredited Chamber of Commerce for the Thames Valley (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Swindon, and Oxfordshire), providing the independent voice of business and championing the region to help ensure it reaches its full economic potential and contributes solutions to the UK's wider growth, health, and decarbonisation challenges.

By way of background, may we invite you to draw upon and reference our previous consultation responses relevant to Oxfordshire, and this consultation. In addition to the hyperlinks provided in this letter, these include:

- [Industrial Strategy – Immediate Feedback](#)
- [Planning and Infrastructure Bill: call for evidence](#)
- [East West Rail](#)
- [England's Economic Heartland – call for evidence](#)
- [Oxfordshire: Travel Plan](#)
- [Great British Railways: Strategic Plan](#)

Our comments follow and we welcome the opportunity of discussing these further as you require AND contributing to the future development and implementation of OxRail 2040.

### **Regional Connections (page 4)**

You are under-playing the significance of major hubs 'just beyond' the Oxfordshire boundary – key drivers of the Oxfordshire economy and connectivity. Specifically, this includes:

- [Reading station](#) is one of the busiest rail hubs in Britain, used by nearly 20 million passengers a year. It is the second busiest interchange station outside of London, second only to Birmingham New Street, with nearly four million passengers a year changing trains at the station.
- Cowley Branch Line: we support the proposals within the Plan while emphasising the benefits the line can provide in regard greater access to east Oxfordshire employment opportunities, from places on the Chiltern Line direct and from the wider Thames Valley, by changing at Oxford (i.e. not just for local trips).
- The Plan mentions [London Heathrow](#) (LHR) in the same sentence as the regional airports (Birmingham and Gatwick) without any reference to its status as the UK's only hub airport, [largest port by value](#) and the **world's most connected airport**. LHR is, by far, the single most important driver of the Thames Valley and Oxfordshire economy – we suggest you 'say so'!
- There is no reference to the [Western Rail Link to London Heathrow](#) (WRLtH) scheme in this section ([East-West Rail](#) mentioned correctly). With reference, most especially, to locations such as Didcot and for the benefit of the southern towns/villages of Oxfordshire, in the context of 'game changing' future rail infrastructure this should be referenced in this section.

### The Case for Change (page 5)

We suggest:

- 'Attracting inward investment' be re-worded to 'attracting higher volume/value inward investment.'
- Adding an additional bullet that references "improving surface access and direct links (by rail) to London Heathrow.'

### Opportunity and Challenges (page 6)

We recommend including reference/comment on both plans for Expanding Heathrow and WRLtH which are both significant opportunities and challenges. Is GWR's [Project Churchward](#) also of relevance here? Politically, will English devolution impact/reshape priorities currently outline in this Plan?

### Enabling Oxfordshire's growth through rail (page 8)

We invite you to consider:

- Who has decided on using language/branding such as 'M4 Silicon Valley'? TVCC's view is that 'Silicon Valley' in very 2000's and we have / are 'moving on'. We can offer further comment on ideas if welcome.
- The life sciences 'golden triangle' embraces Oxfordshire *and Berkshire* (where a significant % of large FDI has concentrated in the past 10-years) – help promoting this regional strength / positioning accordingly.
- Would there be value in including 'infographics' to represent London Heathrow, the south coast 'ports'.
- The Cowley Branch Line and East West Rail get 'large boxes' – why not WRLtH (singularly the largest project by far!)

### Our priorities (page 10)

We strongly recommend the plan includes reference to a fourth priority – WRLtH and improved surface access to London Heathrow.

### Our Phased Delivery (pages 16–19)

- No reference to WRLtH on page 16. We suggest, for the reasons outlined, this should be included alongside reference to improved surface access to an expanding Heathrow.
- We would encourage you to be more bullish and include WRLtH in phase -2-. Certainly ambitions, for example, for a Development Consent Order.

### Concept train service plan to support growth (page 9)

- We support improved connectivity to the County's economic drivers, including the Begbroke, Culham and Harwell campuses (i.e., improved connectivity / service frequency / quality of service).

- Consider, how 'rail' might support ambitions for the [AI Growth Zone at Culham](#).
- We would encourage stronger support/reference to supporting the case for [reinstating the Oxford-Swindon-Bristol rail services](#) (see also [HERE](#)).

#### General Comments

- Oxford Station (page 11) – we support proposals that will enhance the passenger experience of using the County's main station and improve connectivity to the main rail network within/beyond Oxfordshire. This should consider how any/all improvements can be funded via a 'business-led' solution (assuming funds from either the County/City Council or Network Rail will be limited/be insufficient for the timely delivery of the scheme).
- Working together with partners (page 21) – there could be a stronger reference to the business community within the individual phases, e.g. TVCC has consistently championed the timely delivery of the WRLtH, alongside some of the partners mentioned, but you exclude London Heathrow, who should also be consulted/included (for the reasons outlined above).
- Is there a stronger need to link rail with bus services/operations within the plan as part of an integrated transport approach? This should, we propose, include specific consideration within the Plan of promoting an integrated bus interchange right outside the railway station (in Oxford) rather than distance (1 mile of so) away.

We commend the above comments to you and for your consideration.

With a pride in our region and based on a proven history of delivering economic development and productivity growth, TVCC stands ready to support the plan for change and growth set out by the County Council.

Yours sincerely,



**Paul Britton**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

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