

TITLE	Impact of Planned Rail Changes (Cllr Sleight Report)
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 February 2019
WARD	None Specific
DIRECTOR	Director of Locality and Customer Services – Sarah Hollamby

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Planned improvement works to the rail network, within the next 10 years would result in additional route options, services and capacity for residents of Wokingham Borough.

With additional housing and employment uptake within Wokingham Borough and neighbouring authorities within the next 10 years, the improvements in rail services will provide benefits to achieving economic growth and encouraging a modal shift from car to rail, to reduce congestion, and improve noise and air quality on the main road corridors, in line with Core Policy and Local Transport Plan aspirations.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Cllr Sleight's report be noted, taking into account Officers Responses below.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

A report has been compiled by Cllr Sleight, titled "*An investigation into the impact of the planned changes to rail services in Wokingham Borough*". This can be found in Appendix A. This paper summarises the issues raised by the report and provides an officer commentary with regard to how we might be able to progress and address these perceived problems.

The report sets out the planned changes to rail services over the next ten years. There are six rail stations within the borough (Wokingham, Twyford, Earley, Winnersh, Winnersh Triangle and Wargrave) which operate across the following five rail routes:

- Great Western Mainline (GWML)
- Henley On Thames Branch Line
- Reading to Waterloo
- North Downs Line (Reading to Redhill/Gatwick Airport) and
- Reading to Basingstoke Line

Planned infrastructure changes noted within the report include:

- The opening of the Elizabeth Line (Crossrail) in 2019
- The opening of Reading Green Park Station in 2019 and the potential for the a proposed rail station at Grazeley on the Reading to Basingstoke Line
- The opening of Old Oak Common Station in 2026, which would include interchange for HS2, Crossrail and Great Western rail services.

- Western Rail Link to Heathrow (Development Consent Order to be submitted 2019 with construction date to be determined)

In addition to the above infrastructure changes, route modernisation of the Great Western Mainline (GWML) and the Wessex Capacity upgrade on the Reading to Waterloo Line, have commenced and changes continue to be implemented which seek to improve the level of service provision for rail users and available capacity

Analysis of Issues

Due to the planned infrastructure changes on the rail network over the next 10 years, specific issues have been noted in the report prepared by Cllr Sleight which include:

- 1) Increasing demand for travel from Twyford Station.
- 2) The potential for closure of Level Crossing Points
- 3) Coppid Beech Park and Ride and its connectivity with Reading Rail Station
- 4) Potential improvements to Winnersh Triangle Railway Station.

Each of these are discussed further below with an officer response.

Twyford Station

Issue identified in Report

The traffic impacts around Twyford Station and Wargrave Station, based on the introduction of more journey opportunities and the introduction of Crossrail services, and the current availability of other modes.

Officer Response

With regard to the increased parking provision at Twyford, the rail operator (GWR) continues to explore options such as decking the existing car park, but any significant increase in parking at Twyford Station is constrained by the existing highway network and also the Air Quality Management Area at the crossroads.

Enhancements to the current local highway network could potentially be explored, but are likely to be contingent on there being future housing development or other substantial amounts of funding to pay for associated infrastructure. These matters are being actively considered as part of the Local Plan Update process currently taking place

Level Crossings

Issue identified in Report

The potential for closure of Level Crossing Points at Star Lane, Smiths Farm and Barkham Road to improve rail capacity and road traffic congestion. In summary, the report by Cllr Sleight states *“the interface with level crossings in Wokingham is likely to cause severe difficulties and this needs to be considered and addressed as a matter of urgency”*

Officer Response

The closure of level crossing points has to be carefully considered by Network Rail in dialogue with the Council, and any funding of replacement provision (eg bridges) will continue to be discussed with South Wokingham SDL promoters.

Park & Ride

Issue identified in Report

In the conclusion of Cllr Sleight’s report, comment is made to the commercial risk of Coppid Beech Park and Ride based on the level of rail service provision between Wokingham and Reading Stations.

Officer Response

The Coppid Beech Park and Ride was part of the Council’s Core Strategy 2010 and subsequent North Wokingham SDL and Infrastructure Delivery SPDs. It is designed to alleviate traffic congestion on the A329 corridor between Wokingham Town Centre and Bracknell Town Centre, with the potential to connect with Twyford Rail Station.

There is a separate report being considered at this Scrutiny Committee relating to Coppid Beech Park and Ride, which outlines the existing business case.

Winnersh Triangle Railway Station

Issue identified in Report

The paper discusses rebranding and improvements at Winnersh Triangle Railway Station.

Officer Response

The aspirations of the council with regard to improvements at Winnersh Triangle remain and scheme is currently being developed in association with Thames Valley Berkshire LEP.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
N/A

Cross-Council Implications
N/A

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
Appendix A – Cllr Sleight Report <i>An investigation into the impact of the planned changes to rail services in Wokingham Borough</i> ”.

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