

NOTE OF MEETING WITH FGW AND NETWORK RAIL: 6 AUGUST 2008

Those present:

OxRail Action: Zara Akkerhuys, Adrian Sutton, Carol Sweetenham

FGW: Andrew Haines, Richard Rowland

NR: Richard Cole, Dylan Bowen

1. Proposed improvements at Oxford and Didcot: rejection of bid by ORR

A bid of £18m had been submitted to the ORR. This would have covered:

- opening up the freight loops at the north end of the station to passenger services
- a new bay platform at the south end
- an upgrade to the Didcot North junction
- a third track from Kennington to Oxford

The bid had been rejected on the grounds that it did not do enough to improve performance and capacity. ORR would make its final decision in October and there was still time to make representations. However it was possible to make some of these improvements without a successful bid:

- opening up the freight loops to passenger services: this was already scheduled and would happen by the end of January 2009; By allowing passenger services to pull off the mainline onto the upgraded freight loops the mainline would be unblocked for other passenger services.
- putting in the south bay platform. This would take slow services and relieve congestion on the main platforms. There was general agreement from stakeholders on the principle and a possibility of funding from a discretionary fund. However issues remained to be sorted on planning permission, the reconfiguration of the existing car park and on tying down funding. If all these could be resolved the platform could be built by 2011.

Whilst not directly related, it was likely that the bid for redoubling of the North Cotswold line would succeed. This would have the incidental effect of cutting delays which knocked on to Oxford services. If it goes ahead the Cotswold line will be blocked between July and August 2009 to allow major parts of the work to be done. This should not affect services between Oxford and London.

We were encouraged to write to the Department for Transport, the transport minister and the Rail Regulator to lobby for all these improvements.

FGW were due to have discussions on how Oxford station might be impacted were the Weston Otmoor eco-town to go ahead. Post meeting note: currently planned for 16/09/08

The footbridge in Becket Street would be restored, although it did not make sense to do so until plans for the future redevelopment of Oxford Station were clear.

2. Impact of proposed work at Reading Station

A major upgrade would take place at Reading between 2010-14/15. The main elements were to split out services by increasing numbers of platforms, and to create a flyover/tunnel at the Reading West junction to improve flow of trains. The first step was already underway through

the construction of a new signal box at Didcot which would be responsible for the signalling work previously done at Reading. There would not be major alteration of station facilities, but Reading Borough Council were involved with wider regeneration issues. New platforms will be constructed on the north side of the station occupying the site of the current signal box. A consultation would begin on 9-10 September.

Whilst OxRail Action welcome the longer-term impact on punctuality, there are clearly major concerns about the impact on services whilst work is carried out. NR said this was likely to take the form of reduced levels of service at weekends and over the summer: they had no plans to blockade the line as had happened at Rugby. A more detailed plan would be produced by around Easter 2009; and negotiated with FGW: ultimately this could be referred to the ORR. OxRail Action said that they would want to be closely involved with developments and would expect as a minimum to be invited to participate in stakeholder groups. They would press for detailed planning as soon as possible and were very concerned about potential impacts. FGW said that their strategy was to build resilience as far as possible in the Oxford and Didcot section of the line to mitigate against the potential disruption in Reading.

These issues concern OxRail Action and we will want to continue to work closely with NR and FGW over the coming months.

3. Crossrail

The Crossrail proposals had now received Royal Assent. They would take the form of a tunnel under London with an underground station near platform 1 in Paddington and surfacing near Royal Oak then using existing lines as far as Maidenhead. The construction of Crossrail would overlap with the work scheduled at Reading and is expected to be completed in 2016-2017. Detailed planning was less advanced. OxRail Action will take a strong interest in how NR and FGW propose to minimise disruption to passengers.

4. Accountability and visibility of NR

Ox Rail Action asked for three measures:

- a visible Network Rail presence at Paddington alongside the FGW information desk. Too often the response from FGW staff was that disruption was a matter for NR and passengers should take the matter up with them. Hard to do when NR are invisible and uncontactable. NR now attend the monthly meet the manager sessions at Paddington;
- much better liaison between NR and FGW when there was disruption: a simple whiteboard with info would be a good start. This would be particularly important given the level of disruption likely to be created by proposed future work;
- for NR in future to attend the quarterly meetings between FGW and OxRail Action. NR agreed to do so.

Dylan Bowen is the NR contact for OXRAG.

5. Date of next meeting with FGW and NR

For a date in November.

OxRail Action