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Network Rail

Oxford Corridor Phase 2 Capacity Improvement Scheme

Environmental Impact Assessment – Environmental Statement: Chapter 1 – Introduction

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 This chapter sets out the purpose of the Oxford Corridor Phase 2 Capacity Improvement Scheme (hereafter known as the Scheme) and the context in which it is brought forward. The Scheme is a standalone project, however a decision to implement it would help maximise benefits from a wider programme of capacity improvements to the rail infrastructure in the Oxford Corridor. Without the delivery of the Scheme including road and railway infrastructure improvements the future aspirations to redevelop the main station entrance and further rail capacity works to the eastern side of the railway would not be possible.

1.1.2 This Environmental Statement has been prepared on behalf of Network Rail Infrastructure Limited (hereafter referred to as Network Rail). It supports and informs the application seeking prior approval under Part 18 of the General Permitted Development Order 2015. Potential environmental impacts are identified and assessed, and appropriate mitigation measures are proposed in accordance with the Town and Country Planning Environmental Impact Assessment (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017.

1.1.3 The main elements of the Scheme consist of the replacement and realignment of Botley Road Bridge, highway improvements with segregated and dual shared pedestrian and cycle path, a new western entrance to Oxford Station, a new platform, and new station facilities buildings.

1.1.4 The location of the Scheme and its main environmental constraints are shown in Figure 1.1 in Volume 3 of the Environmental Statement, and a detailed description of the Scheme is included in Chapter 2 – Description of the Scheme.

1.2 The Strategic Role of Oxford Station

1.2.1 The strategic role of Oxford Station has changed notably over the last decade. This section sets out the strategic importance of Oxford Station.

1.2.2 A range of national rail projects, including the Great Western Main Line upgrade, electrification and associated rail service enhancements, East-West Rail, and new connections to Heathrow, will continue to strengthen the role and the demands on the Oxford Station in the coming years. The opening of services to Bicester and London Marylebone in December 2016 is further evidence of the demand and growth in connectivity which the dynamic regional economy requires. These changes, alongside the significant projected housing and employment growth in the city and wider county of 100,000 new homes and 85,000 jobs means that the station is fast becoming

an important national rail hub and interchange, as well as being the key gateway into the City of Oxford and the wider county.

1.2.3 The rail industry and Government have recognised the importance of the Thames Valley area in the national rail network and the risk of congestion preventing the rail network from meeting demand. Train operators identify substantial opportunities to increase passenger markets and are concerned congestion at Oxford Station may limit this.

1.2.4 There is a focussed need for more capacity, in particular on the Didcot to Oxford section of the network, which is just two tracks for most of its length. There are also strategic opportunities that unlocking rail capacity through Oxford Station would bring. These include:

- the extension / expansion of East-West Rail services through Oxford;
- the development of passenger services and stations on the Cowley Line; and
- further opportunities for development of the Cotswold Line.

1.2.5 The Government's strategy for the railways for the investment periods up to 2024 is built around four strategic priorities, of which three directly impact on Oxford and Oxfordshire:

- The creation of a high-capacity passenger and freight corridor running from Southampton to Oxford and dividing at Oxford for the East Midlands and South Yorkshire, and for the West Midlands and North West.
- The introduction of faster, longer, and more reliable electric trains to increase capacity and reduce journey times.
- A new railway link to provide access from the west to Heathrow Airport.

1.2.6 Network Rail is already undertaking a £7.5 billion upgrade of the Great Western Mainline which has enhanced routes through large-scale infrastructure works and the introduction of new rolling stock. Other committed strategic rail projects will improve capacity of the rail network and increase opportunities to travel by train to a range of new destinations.

1.2.7 Investment in the strategic rail corridor through Oxford is also an essential part of the transport strategy as a whole, as increasing the capacity of the rail network (for both passengers and freight) reduces pressure and congestion on the strategic highway network, particularly the A34. Rail also has an important role in terms of addressing the "last mile" of journeys, being key to

inclusive accessibility to unlock redevelopment and regeneration by addressing highways pinch points such as that caused by Botley Road.

1.2.8 Oxfordshire has already seen significant investment on bridges, crossings, and flood relief measures to maintain services in the corridor, but the essential investment in replacing the Botley Road Bridge from a local and regional perspective remains outstanding.

1.3 Need for the Scheme

1.3.1 Oxford Station and the Oxford Corridor provide for inter-regional passenger connectivity through Oxfordshire, with Oxford being the main traffic destination. The Oxford Corridor is a strategic part of the Western Rail Route and is busy for both passenger and freight services. The station is currently the fourth busiest station in the Western Route. The existing infrastructure cannot accommodate the proposed growth of these services and it is this growth and constraints along the Oxford Corridor that have driven the capacity requirements for the Scheme.

1.3.2 The overall objective of the Oxford Corridor Capacity Improvement Scheme is to improve capacity and capability as well as operational efficiency through the Oxford Corridor. This is to meet the Strategic Business Plan objectives for capacity enhancement and journey time improvements for the route between Didcot (North Junction) and Oxford (including to Wolvercote Junction). The objectives will facilitate the future aspirations and objectives of the Oxford Station Area Supplementary Planning document which sets out the Station Masterplan (OCC, 2017), known as the 'Masterplan'. This states that:

'The objective for the Masterplan is to develop a rail hub and interchange for Oxford, with enhanced station and passenger facilities, providing sufficient capacity to accommodate predicted growth in passenger numbers for the next 30 years and fulfil its role on the core cross country network at the heart of the 'electric spine'

1.3.3 The Scheme, which forms Phase 2, would enable these aspirations to be delivered. To deliver these aspirations, there is a need to improve efficiency and customer access at the existing Oxford Station. It is expected that installation of a new western entrance and Platform 5 would provide a 50% increase in through-platform capacity for freight and passenger traffic. It would also improve pedestrian movement through and around the station, allowing access to and from the west of Oxford Station. The overall customer experience is expected to be enhanced by the Scheme, encouraging more people to choose to travel by train.

1.3.4 There is a need to encourage greener access choices to the station. Provision of improved cycle and pedestrian access under Botley Road Bridge and increased cycle parking areas would encourage increased use of these modes of transport. Improved segregation from car traffic is expected to improve safety along Botley Road. Realignment of Botley Road Bridge to allow for standard double decker buses would further promote the use of public transport.

1.4 The Consenting Regime

1.4.1 Network Rail is seeking 'Prior Approval' for the Scheme via an application to the Local Planning Authority (Oxford City Council) under Part 18 Class A, Schedule 2 of the General Permitted Development Order 2015 for the railway elements of the Scheme. The Scheme does not require full planning permission but Oxford City Council as the local planning authority must give its approval for the siting and appearance of the Scheme prior to its construction.

1.4.2 Part 18 of the Development Order is applicable to developments which were initially authorised by an Act of Parliament. The station and existing associated railway land around it were constructed under various authorising Acts of Parliament:

- Oxford and Rugby Railway Act 1845 – authorising act for the line between Oxford and Rugby;
- Great Western (Additional Powers) Act 1865 – authorised the purchase of lands in the Parish of St Thomas, Oxford near Oxford Station;
- Great Western Railway (Further Powers) Act 1866 – authorised the purchase of lands between River Sheepwash Bridge and Castle Mill Stream Bridges and the stopping up and construction of Osney Lane Footbridge; and
- Great Western Railway (Additional Powers) Act 1936 – authorised the purchase of lands to allow the widening of River Sheepwash Bridge.

1.4.3 Each of these Acts of Parliament give provisions to and bestows upon the railway company and its successors (Network Rail) the power to make developments necessary to the running and management of the railway, including the erection, construction, alteration or extension of any building or bridge, and the formation, laying out or alteration of a means of access to any highway used by vehicular traffic.

1.4.4 Other consents potentially required for the Scheme are as follows. This is not an exhaustive list; further consents may be required as a result of developing construction methodologies:

- Section 61 noise control (during construction).
- Flood risk activity permits (for Sheepwash Bridge).
- Public Rights of Way orders.
- Various Highways approvals (technical approvals and diversions).
- Transport and Works Act order (for land assembly where agreement hasn't been made).

1.5 Need for Environmental Impact Assessment

1.5.1 The legislative framework for EIA is set by European Directive 2011/92/EU, as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU (collectively referred to as the EIA Directive). These are translated into UK law in various EIA Regulations. Those relevant to this Scheme are the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)) Regulations 2017, hereafter referred to as the 'EIA Regulations'.

1.5.2 The EIA Regulations, require that any proposed development falling within the description of a 'Schedule 2 development' (as defined within the EIA Regulations), will be subject to an EIA when such development exceeds thresholds and is likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of such factors as its nature, size or location (Regulation 2 (1)).

1.5.3 The Scheme is a development that requires EIA as it falls under Schedule 2 Category 10d (Infrastructure: Construction of Railways) of the EIA Regulations and has the potential to give rise to significant effects.

1.5.4 An overview of the EIA process and methodology, including the scoping of the potential significant environment effects is set out in the Environmental Statement in Volume 2 – Chapter 4 – Approach to Environmental Assessment.

1.6 Screening and Scoping

1.6.1 A formal screening and scoping opinion request was submitted in March 2020 to Oxford City Council under Regulations 6 and 15 of the EIA Regulations. However, a subsequent change to the Scheme resulted in an amendment to the Scoping Report which was resubmitted on 8th July 2020.

1.6.2 The request sought to ask Oxford City Council for a formal written opinion on whether it considered the Scheme to constitute EIA development. It also requested confirmation of the scope of the EIA and content of the Environmental Statement based on the proposed approach contained within the Scoping Report (Network Rail, 2020). Chapter 4 - Approach to Environmental Assessment provides the details of the scope of the assessment undertaken for this EIA and included in this Environmental Statement.

1.6.3 A formal written joint Screening and Scoping Opinion was published by Oxford City Council on 5th January 2021. The Scoping Opinion is provided in Volume 4 – Appendix 1.1 to this report. The Scoping Opinion provides guidance on the content of the Environmental Statement based on the consultation undertaken by Oxford City Council with statutory consultees. It also contains the opinion of Oxford City Council. Where an opinion is issued, there is a requirement in the EIA Regulations to base the Environmental Statement on that opinion. Under the EIA Regulations, the Environmental Statement must:

''… be based on the most recent scoping opinion or direction issued (so far as the proposed development remains materially the same as the proposed development which was subject to that opinion or direction);'

1.6.4 To demonstrate compliance with the recommendations of the Scoping Opinion a scoping response register has been created which forms Appendix 1.2 within Volume 4 of the Environmental Statement.

1.7 Purpose and Structure of this Environmental Statement

1.7.1 This Environmental Statement presents the information the applicant is required to provide on likely significant environmental effects of the Scheme. Appendix 1.3 within Volume 4 sets out the requirements of Part 1 Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations and where the relevant information is presented in this Environmental Statement.

1.7.2 The Environmental Statement is presented in four volumes:

- Volume 1: Non-Technical Summary.
- Volume 2: Main Report.
- Volume 3: Book of Figures.
- Volume 4: Supporting Technical Appendices.

1.7.3 **Volume 1** consists of a Non-Technical Summary which provides a concise description of the Scheme, development alternatives, environmental impacts, mitigation measures and residual effects. The Non-Technical Summary is designed to give information on the Scheme to a wide and non-technical audience and to assist interested parties with their familiarisation of the Scheme.

1.7.4 This document is **Volume 2** the Main Report, and comprises:

- Introductory chapters (Chapters 1 to 4) which: introduce the Scheme; provide a description of the study area; outline the history of the Scheme and main alternatives considered; give a description of the Scheme; and detail the approach to the environmental assessment. Chapter 5 describes the legislative and planning framework in the study area;

- Technical assessment chapters (Chapters 6 to 15) that detail: the results of environmental assessment; impacts arising; and proposed mitigation measures. The topics covered are: air quality and odour; geology and soils; historic environment; landscape and visual; noise and vibration; population; human health; traffic and transport, water resources and flood risk and cumulative effects. Matters scoped out of the EIA are identified in each chapter together with an explanation;

- Concluding chapter (Chapter 16) that provides a summary of the residual effects identified in Chapters 6 to 14, together with a summary of the mitigation measures identified that should be secured through conditions; and

- The list of references is presented at the end of each chapter.

1.7.5 Within each of the technical assessment chapters, the information provided is structured in a consistent way, as far as practicable. Table 1.1 provides further information on the structure of each technical chapter.

Table 1.1: Structure of Technical Assessment Chapters

Section	Content of section
Introduction	Outlines the content, key objectives of the chapter and identifies the key issues to be considered in the assessment and any issues.
Legislation, policies and guidance	Outlines the legislation, policies and guidance that the assessment has been undertaken in accordance with.

Section	Content of section
Methodology	Outlines the consultation undertaken with statutory consultees and other organisations; • defines the study area setting out geographical and temporal scope; • identifies sources of baseline data; • sets out the assessment methods including the criteria used to assess the significance of the effects; • identifies issues which are considered unlikely to be significant and which have been scoped out of detailed assessment; and • any limitations encountered in undertaking the assessment.
Baseline conditions	Summarises the baseline situation, including field survey results where appropriate. Includes a prediction of the future environmental conditions and changes (future baseline) likely to occur in the absence of the development, which are relevance to the topic assessed.
Design and best practice measures	Outlines any further modifications to the design as part of the iterative design process.
Assessment of effects	Details the likely significance of effects (both negative and positive) of the development during the construction and operational phases. Proposed mitigation and residual effects are detailed.
Additional mitigation measures	Describes the measures which have been proposed to mitigate effects and the outcome or benefit it would provide.
Summary of residual effects	Summarises in tabular format the significance of effects, mitigation measures and residual effects.
Conclusions	Recaps the key components of the assessment and provides a conclusion.

1.7.6 The assessment section of each technical chapter is structured in a way that is most logical for that topic, and whilst maintaining the general structure identified in Box 1, may include other sections specific to that topic. The technical terms and acronyms for all chapters and appendices are defined within Volume 4 – Appendix 1.5.

1.7.7 **Volume 3** comprises supporting figures (including photomontages).

1.7.8 **Volume 4** provides a set of technical appendices including technical reports, surveys and data which have informed the EIA and preparation of the Environmental Statement. This information is supplied as a separate volume to prevent the main body of the Environmental Statement becoming excessively long and cumbersome.

1.7.9 The application is also accompanied by several associated documents. such as the design drawings and the combined Planning and Design and Access Statement.

1.8 Statement of Expertise

1.8.1 Regulation 5(5) of the EIA Regulations requires that:

"(*5) in order to ensure the completeness and quality of the EIA Report –*

(a) the developer must ensure that the EIA Report is prepared by competent experts; and

(b) the EIA Report must be accompanied by a statement from the developer outlining the relevant expertise or qualifications of such experts."

1.8.2 Jacobs has coordinated the EIA and compiled this Environmental Statement on behalf of Network Rail. Jacobs has secured the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) Quality Mark for EIA. The EIA Quality Mark is a voluntary scheme, participating organisations are required to comply with seven EIA Commitments (viewable on the IEMA website). This provides assurance to third party stakeholders that Jacobs is committed to producing Environmental Statements of high quality which are regularly reviewed by IEMA.

1.8.3 Details of the relevant qualifications and experience of the lead members of the EIA team are set out in Volume 4– Appendix 1.4.

1.9 Availability of Environmental Statement

1.9.1 The Environmental Statement will be submitted to the local planning authority, Oxford City Council, as part of the application process when seeking the Council's prior approval to the siting and design. It is envisaged that the documents associated with the Scheme will be made available on the council's planning website at https://www.oxford.gov.uk/ . Normally the Environmental Statement would also be available at several locations for public viewing. However, due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, it is proposed to also make the Environmental Statement available to view on Network Rail's website at https://www.networkrail.co.uk/. This is in accordance with guidelines issued by the Government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hard copies will be available upon request.

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