

Cabinet
Thursday, 23 November 2023, 10.00 am, Lakeview Room,
County Hall

Agenda

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CABINET
23 NOVEMBER 2023**EXPANSION OF CAR PARK AT WORCESTERSHIRE
PARKWAY RAIL STATION**

Relevant Cabinet Member

Cllr Marc Bayliss

Relevant Chief Officer

Strategic Director for Economy and Infrastructure

Local Member

Cllr L Robinson

Recommendation

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills recommends that Cabinet:

- (a) notes progress to date and authorises the continuation of exploratory works, including surveys, necessary to progress the expansion of the Project;**
- (b) endorses the allocation of funding earmarked within the approved capital programme to secure the land and associated rights shown edged red on the exempt plan (“the Land”) needed for the Project ;**
- (c) authorises the Strategic Director for Commercial and Change to negotiate and enter into an Access Agreement with the owner of the Land to facilitate all necessary surveys of the land required for the Project and, if this cannot be agreed by negotiation, to serve the relevant notice to enable surveys to take place;**
- (d) authorises the Strategic Director for Economy and Infrastructure, in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills, to finalise the design of the Project and access links to the highway;**
- (e) authorises the Strategic Director for Economy and Infrastructure to instruct the development of potential funding models for the construction and operation of the Project ; and**
- (f) authorises the Strategic Director for Commercial and Change to endeavour to acquire the Land through negotiation, and delegates authority to the Strategic Director for Commercial and Change in consultation with the**

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills, to adjust the boundaries of the Land to be acquired;

(g) should it not be possible to buy the Land through negotiation and, [subject to (e) above,] approves the preparation of a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) to acquire the Land for subsequent approval by Cabinet;

(h) notes that a further report will be presented to Cabinet to seek approval to enter into any funding agreements to enable the construction and operation of the car park.

Why are these decisions important?

2. Worcestershire Parkway station, which opened in February 2020, has since the Pandemic, consistently performed above expectations, and is now being used by over 500 000 passengers a year with associated car park demand which is now around 90% full on mid-weekdays.

3. Worcestershire County Council (the Council) led on the development of Worcestershire Parkway, a strategic investment to significantly enhance accessibility to rail in the County, increasing direct access to train services, and reduce the need to drive to alternative stations out of the county such as Birmingham International and Warwickshire Parkway to access services and car parking.

4. Through the Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy (WRIS) and the Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4), the County has set out its ambition to continue to promote rail travel as an alternative to road, by working with the Train Operating Companies, Midlands Connect and Network Rail. This is ongoing, with future service developments being discussed for the station. Emerging evidence from the Travel Planning has identified that Worcestershire Parkway has been successful in attracting new passenger to rail and increasingly to commence their journeys in the county. This in turn brings highway congestion benefits.

5. The expansion of the car park at Worcestershire Parkway (The Project) is integral to consolidating these achievements and to enable the further development and expansion of the rail offer. The potential need for this was acknowledged in the original business plan and the grant of planning permission for the station.

6. Commencing the Project at this time is appropriate, acknowledging the current level of demand and planning for continued growth in passenger numbers and services. County Council has commenced leading on this project, alongside partners including the train operating companies. This reflects County's ongoing role as the owners of the station, albeit on a long lease to Network Rail and through them to the train operating company, Great Western Railway, but also the changes in the industry following the Pandemic. The train operating companies are now solely focussed on service delivery, and are subject to annual contracts with additional constraints which prohibit them from making long term investment decisions such as is required at Worcestershire Parkway.

7. As Projects leads, the Council will fully explore the economic models for the Project, reflecting the investment and income opportunities which this may present.

Background

8. The Council published its first Rail Investment Strategy (WRIS) in 2017, which focused on prioritising the outputs of better rail connectivity against its value in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the County's economy and new jobs generated. Sufficient car parking capacity at local rail stations was identified as a key requirement for improved connectivity to rail services and as such the Council identified and developed a comprehensive programme of car park expansion schemes.

9. Following the advent of the COVID pandemic ("the Pandemic"), which led to a 77% collapse in 2020/21 passenger demand, the 2017 WRIS has been reviewed to take account of the post-Pandemic climate, rail developments since 2017 and the significant growth in housing numbers in Worcestershire Local Plans.

10. This review included car park expansion schemes, which have been both rationalised and prioritised to ensure that demand at stations showing strong evidence of post-Pandemic recovery and growth such as Worcestershire Parkway is not suppressed by inadequate car parking capacity.

Worcestershire Parkway

11. Following the opening of Worcestershire Parkway rail station in February 2020 (approx. 4 weeks before the first lockdown), passenger growth has significantly exceeded all of the business case expectations. This can be seen in Table 1 below which shows the impact of the Pandemic and the actual growth in passenger trips compared to the original business case.

	Annual Passenger Trips
Railway Year 2019/20 (pro-rata for 6 weeks of operation before lockdown)	142,000
2020/21 Y1 of lockdown	36,000
2021/22 Y2 of lockdown	336,000
2022/23	519,542
Original Business Case (CH2M Feb 2015 version)	383,000 by 2034

Table 1: Growth in actual passenger trips compared to the original business case

12. The above numbers show that in year 3 of the station's operation, it is accommodating passenger numbers equivalent to a station that has been open for 14 years. This clearly demonstrates the importance of this strategic station for the County. The passenger travel survey for 22/23 indicates that 45% of the demand for rail at Worcestershire Parkway is for travel to work. Critically 84% of travellers indicated that prior to the opening of the station they undertook their entire journey by car indicating that the station has generated demand and is reducing journeys by car.

13. Figure 1 below shows the forecast growth in passenger numbers based on a study undertaken during 2020 without the benefit of actual ticket sales data and the forecast based on the actual ticket sales from opening provided by GWR and train services operating in February 2022.

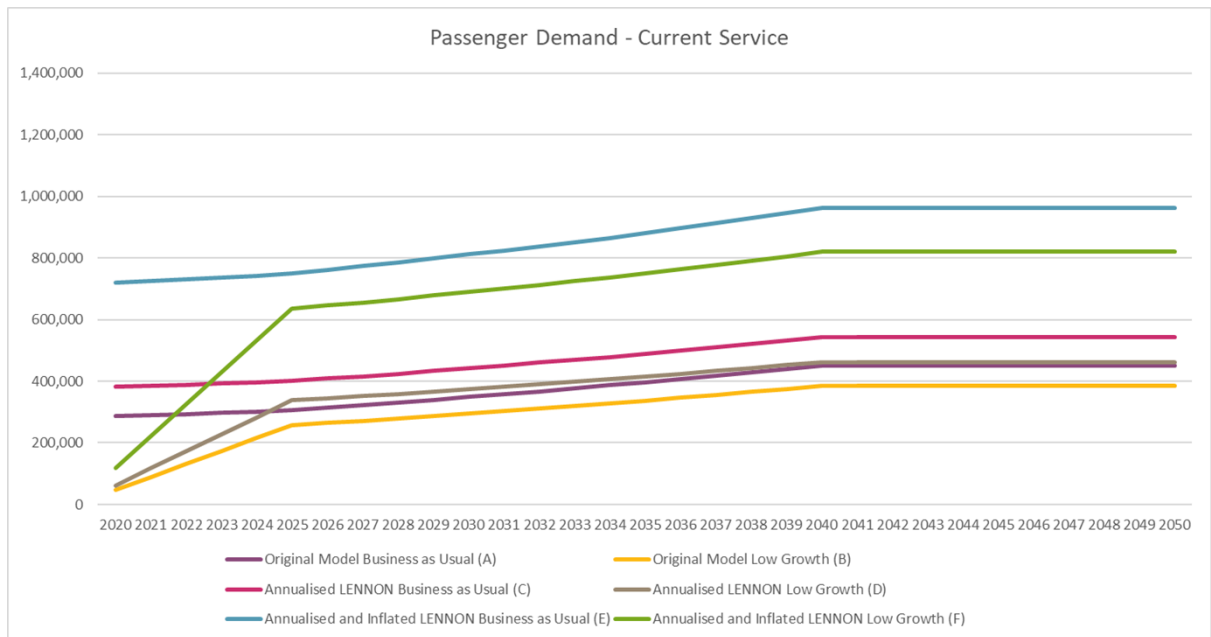


Figure 1: Forecast growth based on modelling assumptions and actual ticketing data
As can be seen from the graph above, in all scenarios growth in passenger numbers at Worcestershire Parkway is expected to continue through to 2040.

14. Key to the station’s success has been the range of journey opportunities and connectivity to the wider rail network that it facilitates together with the provision of sufficient car parking spaces. It is therefore imperative that capacity for arrivals and departures at the station by all modes (bus, taxi, cycling and walking) keeps pace with the continued growth in passenger demand and that opportunities for future expansion are progressed and protected in line with the demand forecasts that have been undertaken since the station opened.

15. Demand for the car park at Worcestershire Parkway is subject to ongoing monitoring with patterns of demand emerging. The car park is quieter at weekends than on weekdays, with Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday showing consistently highest demand. On these days the car park is virtually full.

16. Should the car park become full this is likely to suppress demand and passenger growth, decrease the potential for additional services to call at the rail station or prevent service expansion. Indeed, industry standards suggest that suppression of demand may occur when a car park consistently reaches or exceeds 80% of capacity as motorists become concerned that they might not be able to find a space and seek alternative stations or modes of travel.

Progress to Date

17. In order to progress the delivery of the Project, the following actions have been undertaken:

- A comprehensive Options Selection process resulting in the identification of a viable option within close proximity to the station, which maximizes the use of the infrastructure already in place

- A draft Client Outcome Specification detailing the key objectives and outputs for the scheme and this has been approved by the Rail Programme Board
- A preliminary assessment of land has been carried out, an initial planning appraisal has been undertaken and initial in-principle discussions with the landowner have commenced.

Legal, Financial and HR Implications

18. Funding for the development of the proposals has been allocated through the Station Car Park Investment programme fund included within the approved capital programme.

19. To enable access to the Land and ensure that all the necessary surveys can be commenced to facilitate the development of, and prevent delays to, the Project programme access to the Land will be required. If this cannot be secured by negotiation, statutory notice under section 172 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 may be served on the landowner to enable this.

20. If the Land cannot be secured by negotiation, it may be necessary to prepare a CPO. Approval would be sought from Cabinet before any such CPO were made and the request for such approval would set out a compelling case why the decision to make a CPO is in the public interest.

21. The detailed future financial model for operation and delivery of the Project is to be developed. However, this will be on the basis of capital investment being repaid through the additional income generated from the receipt of car park income as is the case with the existing station car-park. As such, any future costs are fully expected to be recovered from income generation and progression of the car park scheme will be subject to the development of a fully costed business case for approval by Cabinet.

22. There are no HR implications arising from this report.

Risk Implications

23. Besides the risk of abortive costs if the Project were not to proceed, any risks will be addressed in subsequent papers to Cabinet addressing the business case, which will include the operational business model, and the acquisition of the Land by CPO should that become necessary. Unless or until such decisions are made, the principal risk remains the one which the Project endeavours to mitigate i.e. a demand for car-parking at Worcestershire Parkway which starts to exceed existing provision.

Joint Equality, Public Health, Data Protection and Sustainability Impact Assessments

24. A **joint impact assessment (JIA)** has been completed for this report, which identified that there are no concerns based on the current phase of the development of the proposals. However, further and more detailed assessments on all matters will be required as the project is developed and further supporting information is developed.

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1 - Land requirements (exempt)

Specific Contact Point for this report

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Strategic Director for Economy and Infrastructure) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

[Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy 2017](#)

[Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy 2023](#)

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