

ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

17 NOVEMBER 2023

WORCESTERSHIRE RAIL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Summary

1. The Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel has requested an update on the Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy review and consultation and to outline achievements, next steps and proposals.
2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills, and Senior Officers from the Economy and Infrastructure Directorate have been invited to attend the meeting to respond to any queries from Panel Members.

Background

3. The first Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy (WRIS) was adopted in 2017, reflecting ongoing increases in passenger numbers and investment in rail.
4. Significant achievements during the strategy period include; the opening of the new Worcestershire Parkway Station, rebuilding of Kidderminster Station, extension of the Cross City Line South to provide 3 trains per hour to both Redditch and Bromsgrove.
5. The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the rail industry as initially passenger numbers fell significantly. Following the lifting of restrictions, work and rail travel patterns have evolved. Structural change was also expected in the industry with the Government proposals for Great British Railways. Given these considerations, it was appropriate to review the Rail Investment Strategy for Worcestershire.
6. The new strategy is informed by the first Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy but refined to reflect passenger transport post-Covid-19 and to align with regional strategies such as the West Midland Rail Executive's Rail Investment Strategy.

Rail Investment Strategy

7. The second Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy (WRIS2) was published for consultation in 2022. This is a long-term Strategy with an end date of 2050. It and sets out the requirements and aspirations for rail travel in the County.
8. Rail services in the County are provided by three train operating companies: West Midlands Trains, Cross Country Trains and Great Western Railway. At the heart of WRIS2 are proposals to expand the rail service offer in the County and improve connectivity to neighbouring and regional economies whilst taking into account changes to rail and the increased emphasis on innovative and third-party funding models.

9. WRIS2 was published for consultation in summer/autumn 2022. There were 198 responses to the consultation of which 92% were from individuals and the remaining 8% on behalf of organisations.

10. The responses covered 4 key themes:

- **Fares and ticketing, and train services**

The cost and complexity of the fares system is an acknowledged issue within the rail industry. Although not something over which Worcestershire County Council (the Council) has direct responsibility, the Council is working with West Midlands Rail Executive on the regional review of fares and ticketing within their area. This is also one of the priorities assigned by Government to Great British Railways.

- **Facilities at stations**

Concerns raised include active travel, car park capacity and ticket office opening hours. The Council has an ongoing programme of increasing capacity at car parks to increase access to rail subject to demand. A series of Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans are also being developed for the main towns in Worcestershire which will identify links to the main facilities and destinations including linking rail stations with areas of employment and housing. Since the WRIS2 was adopted, a national proposals and consultation commenced on the future of rail ticket offices. The Council responded to this, highlighting the disadvantages that this would bring to the travelling public if these offices were closed and the wider impact on stations and the availability of facilities, and in particular to travellers with special needs or during disruption.

- **Rail infrastructure**

Worcester re-signalling to a new station to the West of Worcester and Droitwich Station. Worcester re-signalling delivery will be by Network Rail or its successor organisation and will change the current semaphore signals to modern electronic signals. Further work is required from Network Rail on detailed configuration, but delivery is likely to be beyond 2030/35 given the complexity and costs of this work.

- **Stakeholder engagement and funding**

A wide range of stakeholders were engaged in the consultation, from the rail industry to rail organisations such as the user groups, station adopters and line promotion groups. The consultation was publicised to the wider public through both print and social media, including through the Council's website.

11. Following on from the consultation, the document has now been formally approved by the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills and the Strategic Director for Economy and Infrastructure and is published on the website.

Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy 2 - Aspirations

12. The Strategy sets out the aspirations for the following service improvements:

- London/Oxford - Ongoing preparation of outline Business Case for faster, Worcester-London trains, 2 trains per hour (tph) and direct 1 tph Kidderminster/Droitwich Spa to London through the North Cotswold Line.

- GB-wide connectivity - Exeter-Worcestershire Parkway-Manchester and Midlands Connect Birmingham-Worcestershire Parkway-Bristol/Cardiff services.
 - Worcestershire-Bristol - 2023 implementation of Department for Transport (DfT) options for 1 tph Worcester-Tewkesbury-Cheltenham Spa-Gloucester-Bristol service.
 - Birmingham/HS2 - Earliest restoration of Worcester, Bromsgrove, Redditch and Kidderminster-Birmingham frequencies removed during Covid-19, and future expansion.
13. Since WRIS 2 was adopted attached at Appendix 1, the DfT proposal of 1 tph Worcester to Bristol has been implemented, and the service from Worcester to Birmingham has been restored to pre-Covid-19 levels.
 14. Challenges remain on the Cross City Line from Redditch and Bromsgrove to Birmingham with services restricted to two trains per hour. This is in part a reflection of wider service enhancements on the adjoining Camp Hill Line into Birmingham and the return of passenger services on this route.
 15. Work has continued on the proposals for the North Cotswold line, with an ongoing refresh of the business case, reflecting changes in travel patterns post-Covid-19, demand for business travel to London and the South East aligned with the growth aspirations in the local plans enroute. The Stratford Line Promotion Group are also leading a related study into the potential to return services to the Honeybourne to Stratford line, originally funding through Restoring Your Railway. The Council is part of the ongoing review of this business case.
 16. In addition to the rail service proposals, WRIS2 also considers rail stations in the County. Rail stations are at the heart of travel and need to be fully accessible to all within the community, prevent exclusion and offer travel choice to all. As part of the first Worcestershire Rail investment Strategy, the Council reviewed the facilities at the stations including car parking.
 17. This has continued through WRIS2 with a programme of monitoring and, where demand is sufficient developing options for car park expansion including associated facilities such cycle parking and electric vehicle charging.
 18. The regeneration of Worcester Shrub Hill station is proposed as part of the wider re-invention of the Shrub Hill Quarter, providing a gateway to rail travel in Worcester, enhancements to facilities and the station buildings and an improved service offer.
 19. The strategy includes the proposals for the redevelopment of Redditch Station, a project which is well advanced, along with proposals for a new station to the West of Worcester at Rushwick reflecting the westward housing growth in Worcester.
 20. Wider, WRIS2 links to the West Midlands Rail Executive Rail Investment Strategy and, in particular, their aspiration for the Midlands Rail Hub which will deliver a doubling of the Birmingham-Worcester-Hereford service. The funding for these proposals has now been secured through the Government's Network North plan, following the withdrawal of the proposed HS2 route to the north of Birmingham.

21. To assist with the delivery of Midlands Rail Hub, the rail signals in Worcestershire, which are currently old semaphore technology, require upgrading to modern electronic technology, a project referred to as Worcester re-signalling. Network Rail are responsible for this delivery, and this remains a focus of discussion to support the delivery of the Midlands Rail Hub and the wider rail aspirations for Worcestershire. The date for any works to commence is to be confirmed but is unlikely to be 2030/2035.
22. Although fares and ticketing are not a direct responsibility of the Council, WRIS2 includes reference to this area of work reflecting the widespread concern amongst travellers. This has been set as a priority for Great British Railways by the Government and more locally, West Midlands Rail Executive are also focussed on this with the aim to put forward proposals in 2024. Although initially the proposals focus on the Combined Authority Area, this will subsequently be expanded to the wider region.

Purpose of the Meeting

23. The Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- Consider the information provided
- Determine any comments the Panel would wish to make to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills,
- Agree whether any further Scrutiny is required at this stage.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 - [Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy 2](#)

Specific Contact Points for this report

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Head of Legal and Democratic Services) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy
[The Local Transport Plan | Worcestershire County Council](#)

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)