



<b>Environment Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Report Title:</b>	County Rail Update
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	3 March 2021
<b>Chair:</b>	Cllr Rob Bird
<b>Presenting Officer:</b>	Rob Niblett - Senior Planning Officer
<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	To consider ongoing rail matters in Gloucestershire
<b>Planned Dates</b>	Local Transport Plan – proposed adoption at Full Council on 17 <sup>th</sup> March 2021.
<b>Background documents:</b>	<p>Gloucestershire Rail Investment Strategy: <a href="https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/2096940/gloucestershire-rail-strategy.pdf">https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/2096940/gloucestershire-rail-strategy.pdf</a></p> <p>Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan 2015 - 2041 <a href="http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/ltp4">www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/ltp4</a></p> <p>Network Rail Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy <a href="https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Traction-Decarbonisation-Network-Strategy-Interim-Programme-Business-Case.pdf">https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Traction-Decarbonisation-Network-Strategy-Interim-Programme-Business-Case.pdf</a></p> <p>Western Gateway Sub National Transport Body Rail Strategy <a href="https://westerngatewaystb.org.uk/strategy/rail-strategy/">https://westerngatewaystb.org.uk/strategy/rail-strategy/</a></p>
<b>Appendices</b>	None.
<b>Recommendations</b>	To note the contents of the report.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1.** This report sets out to update Members with regard to rail matters in Gloucestershire and to flag up future issues that may arise from the current pandemic.
- 1.2.** Gloucestershire has nine rail stations with eight managed by Great Western Railway (GWR) and Lydney managed by Transport for Wales (TfW). Services are provided by three Train Operating Companies (TOCs) - GWR, Cross Country Trains (CCT) and TfW.
- 1.3.** The rail stations are owned by Network Rail (NR). Before the pandemic Cheltenham (c.2.5m 2019/20) had the highest footfall followed by Gloucester (c.1.5m 2019/20).

## **2. Impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic**

- 2.1.** Not surprisingly, passenger numbers have plummeted since the start of the pandemic. Numbers have fluctuated in line with the level of restrictions in place at any given time. The current lockdown with the message to stay at home has again led to a severe decline in people travelling on the rail network.
- 2.2.** Rail franchises were placed in Emergency Measures Agreements by the Government at the start of the first lockdown. Essentially the railway has been nationalised, with the Government taking the risk from the shortfall in revenue and paying TOCs to provide services. There have been several iterations of the timetables to take account of the restrictions in place.
- 2.3.** The reduction of stops at Chepstow and Lydney on the Cardiff to Cheltenham service primarily by CCT has caused considerable problems for students from the Forest of Dean going to schools in Gloucester and Cheltenham. Although TfW have maintained their stops at Chepstow and Lydney, they terminated their services at Gloucester for a few weeks which caused further problems in terms of journey times and extended waiting times at Gloucester station in the evening. These have been restored in the main.
- 2.4.** CCT have reinstated a number of their Cardiff to Nottingham services, although there are still a few gaps, notably in the afternoon which were causing problems for pupils when attending school. This service is due to be restored in May 2021.
- 2.5.** On the long distance North to South West route, CCT have reduced services to one an hour instead of two an hour. GWR have reduced the number of direct services to London with a Cheltenham to Swindon shuttle service running in between the direct services.
- 2.6.** It is possible that in the short term the Government will reduce rail services nationally due to low demand and the need to cut costs, until such a time when circumstances and public confidence allow more travel.
- 2.7.** Punctuality of the remaining services has increased due to less congestion on the network. Freight traffic has remained at near normal levels, with some sectors reducing flows and others increasing.
- 2.8.** The longer term impact of the pandemic on rail demand is difficult to predict. Increased working from home is likely to continue with the consequent reduction in the number of commuters, a major source of revenue for TOCs. The traditional morning and evening peaks are likely to reduce and be spread more widely over the day. Leisure traffic will probably return to reasonable levels as was demonstrated last Summer when restrictions were eased. Also, there is the ongoing need to access education and training as

well as employment which is likely to remain. However, overall passenger numbers are unlikely to return to pre-Covid levels for a number of years.

- 2.9. Clearly rail has a crucial role to play in reducing carbon emissions and congestion by providing an attractive alternative to the car. Therefore it is important that post-Covid services are able to meet these objectives particularly given the considerable amount of development that is planned to take place in the county over the next two decades.
- 2.10. The Gloucestershire Rail Investment Strategy (GRIS) identified the Bristol to Birmingham corridor as the most economically important for the county - mainly because of the potential connectivity it offers with an enhanced level of services calling at Cam and Dursley, Gloucester and Ashchurch for Tewkesbury. This value will increase significantly given that a lot of the planned new development in Gloucestershire is likely to be close to this axis. The route mirrors the M5 and so offers opportunities for modal shift. The GRIS has helped inform the strategic planning work of NR.

### **3. Timetable and Capacity Improvements**

- 3.1. Despite the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, NR continue to progress their long term strategic planning process. The Bristol to Birmingham Rail Corridor Study involves a range of organisations along the route including local authorities as well as representatives from the rail industry. The Western Gateway Sub National Transport Body's (WGSNTB) Rail Strategy formed the baseline for the work and is the client.
- 3.2. The aim is to reconcile the competing long term service aspirations from organisations based on economic and demand analysis informed by the proposed housing and employment growth along the route up to 2031 as set out in adopted local plans. Longer term growth is also taken into account.
- 3.3. Three Indicative Train Service Specifications have been set out which will now be subject to further analysis by NR. All three show a significant uplift for services within Gloucestershire both local and regional.
- 3.4. These include improved services between Bristol – Gloucester – Worcester, which is currently every two hours as well as additional trains between Cardiff and Birmingham and on the South Cotswold line.
- 3.5. An hourly Bristol to Worcester service is planned to start in December 2021 along with an additional Bristol to Gloucester service (subject to approval from the West of England Combined Authority [WECA]).
- 3.6. NR recently published its Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy which identifies all the lines in the county for future electrification although no timescale is given for this. Electrification offers a number of economic benefits as well as environmental, including increasing capacity on lines and reducing noise.
- 3.7. The County Council is a member of the North Cotswold Line Task Force which seeks to promote additional services and faster journey times between Worcester, Moreton in Marsh, Oxford and London. It has set out a number of costed interventions and infrastructure enhancements needed to bring about these service improvements in a Strategic Outline Business Case. This has been submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT).

### **4. New Rail Stations**

- 4.1. The emerging review of the Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2015 - 2041 commits GCC to work with the rail industry to examine the case for a possible new station south of Gloucester. This is to help enable

sustainable growth to take place. The LTP was approved at Cabinet on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and will be considered for adoption at Full Council on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

- 4.2.** Studies carried out by NR previously have indicated that there is limited capacity on the line for a new rail station. South Gloucestershire Council are currently progressing plans for a new station at Charfield.
- 4.3.** Given the limited scope on the route for a new rail station, it is important that studies are carried out to determine, whether a new station is viable and, if so, where it should be positioned to offer the greatest benefits in terms of access, connectivity and reducing transport related emissions.
- 4.4.** Accordingly, a bid is being made to the third round of the DfT's Restoring Your Railway Fund. This is specifically for funding to look at the feasibility of a possible new rail station south of Gloucester. This, along with the emerging multi modal study that the County Council has recently commissioned, will help inform where the most appropriate (if any) location is for a new rail station that would best support long term sustainable strategic growth in this part of the county.

## **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1.** The ongoing impact of the pandemic on passenger numbers will be felt for a number of years and travel patterns are likely to change permanently. However, to ensure that transport is increasingly decarbonised to reduce its impact on climate change, it is important that improved services are in place to meet demand when it returns. It is therefore crucial that the County Council continues to actively engage with the rail industry individually and collectively through active participation in the WGSNTB and other partners.
- 5.2.** There is significant growth planned in the county over the next thirty years and rail has a key role to play in enabling this to take place sustainably.