

# BRIEFING NOTE

**Project Name:** Stratford – Worcester - Oxford Connectivity, Strategic Outline Business Case

**Date:** 12<sup>th</sup> March 2021

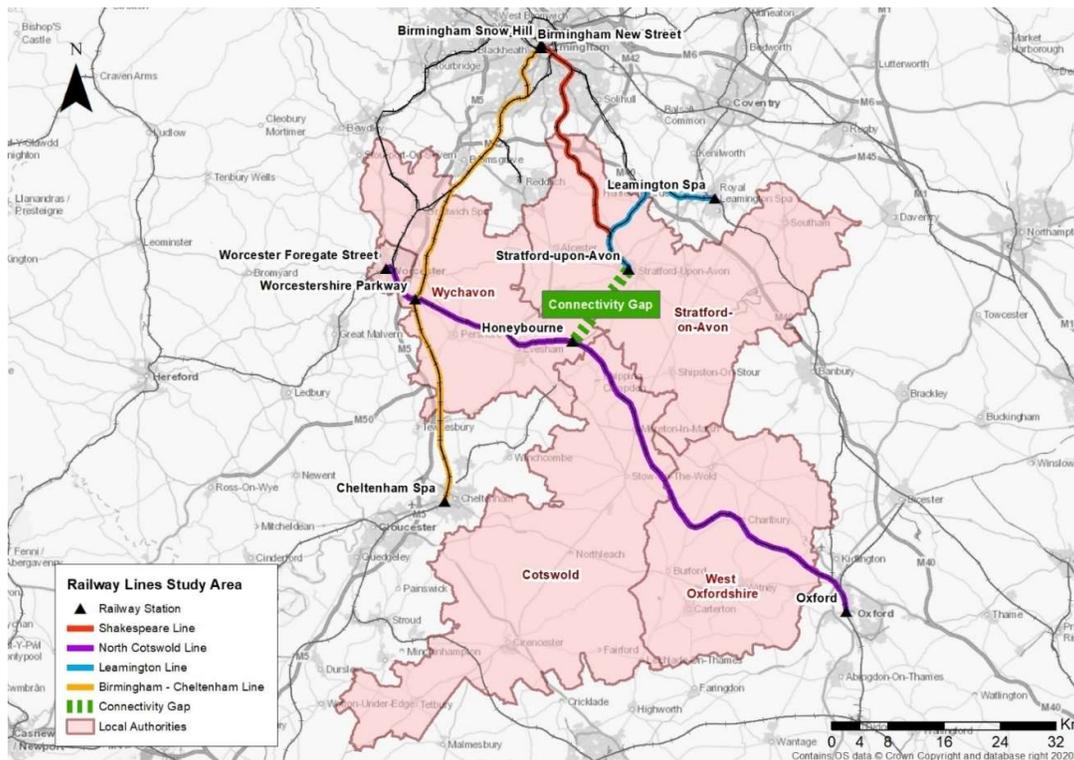
**Subject:** Stakeholder Engagement Briefing Note

Stantec, in partnership with AllanRail and PRA Operations Planning, has been commissioned to prepare a **Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC)** to determine the feasibility and relative benefits of improving strategic transport connectivity between Stratford-upon-Avon, Worcester, Oxford and further afield, with specific reference to the **reinstatement of the Stratford-upon-Avon to Honeybourne rail connection**. The study has been procured by Wychavon District Council (WDC), with the Cotswold Line Promotion Group, Shakespeare Line Promotion Group, Stratford Rail Transport Group and Solihull & Leamington Rail Users Association collectively acting as Lead Promoter. The funding partners for the study are WDC; Worcestershire County Council / Worcestershire LEP; Gloucestershire County Council; Cotswold District Council; Stratford-on-Avon District Council; Warwickshire County Council; Cotswold Line Promotion Group; Stratford Rail Transport Group; and Shakespeare Line Promotion Group.

The work follows WDC’s successful application for funding from the Government’s **Restoring Your Railway Ideas Fund** and represents the first stage in the development of a business case for improving transport connectivity.

## Background

The rail connection between Stratford and Honeybourne closed in 1976. The implication of this was that the Shakespeare Line (Birmingham Snow Hill – Stratford-upon-Avon) became a branch with no through services onto the North Cotswold Line, which connects Hereford and Worcester with Oxford, Reading and ultimately London Paddington (and London Heathrow and Gatwick, with interchange). The gap in rail connectivity created by the closure of the line is illustrated in the map below:



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This loss of this connectivity has fostered increased car-dependency and usage and led to a degree of severance between Stratford and settlements in the Worcester – Chipping Norton corridor. Moreover, Stratford, as an internationally important tourist destination, is poorly connected by public transport both to other significant tourist destinations (e.g. Oxford, the Cotswolds etc) and London as the main point of entry for international visitors to the UK.

The purpose of this study therefore is to assess options for improving strategic public transport connectivity between Stratford-upon-Avon and Worcester, Oxford and further afield.

### Strategic Outline Business Case

As noted in the introductory section, this SOBC study stems from the DfT's *Restoring Your Railway* Ideas Fund, and thus there will inevitably be a significant focus on the restoration of the Stratford – Honeybourne connection and the potential service opportunities which this offers. The work will build on the Stratford Rail Study (2012).

However, it is essential to note that an SOBC should not start from the perspective of a solution, rather it should consider all **transport problems & opportunities** and their **societal impacts**. Building on this evidence base, **transport planning objectives** are set and a long-list of **multi-modal** options are generated and appraised. The SOBC concludes with a meaningful shortlist of options to be progressed to Outline Business Case (OBC), the next stage in the business case process. In short, this study will consider all options for improving strategic public transport connectivity – be that heavy rail, light rail or bus / coach - between Stratford and Worcester, Oxford and points south.

The SOBC will be developed using the 'Five Case Model' approach for developing business cases, as required by H.M. Treasury. This will cover:

- **Strategic Case:** Defining the rationale for intervention and identifying a shortlist of options which could deliver the project-specific and wider policy objectives.
- **Economic Case:** Assessing the options to determine their value for money in terms of economic, social and environmental benefits and costs.
- **Financial Case:** A full financial appraisal of the options
- **Commercial Case:** Providing evidence on the commercial viability of the proposals and the procurement strategy that will be used to engage the market.
- **Management Case:** Detailing the project management plans, outlining the framework for managing risk, benefits realisation, post-project evaluation and the project as a whole.

At the SOBC stage, the primary focus is on the Strategic and Economic Cases (i.e. determining the 'why' and 'what'), with the Commercial, Financial and Management Cases (i.e. the 'how') being of lesser prominence.

Identifying a strong rationale for intervention is fundamental as this forms the backbone of the SOBC and ensures that study objectives and the resulting options developed deliver identified socio-economic benefits that positively contribute to local, regional and national policy objectives.

### Your Involvement

To inform this study we are undertaking an engagement programme to obtain views on the existing transport problems in the area; the opportunities which could be realised with improved strategic connectivity between Stratford and Worcester, Oxford and further afield; and the investment aspirations of different stakeholders.

As part of this initiative, we would like to offer you / your organisation to provide feedback and views on the following:

- The study and its objectives

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- The sphere of influence of potential options i.e., who will benefit, and how, from improving strategic transport connectivity between Stratford and Worcester, Oxford and further afield.
- What the existing transport problems are for those living within this sphere of influence, and the opportunities which could be realised by improved connectivity.
- The options you believe would help alleviate existing transport problems.
- The type and magnitude of socio-economic outcomes and impacts which improved transport connectivity could generate.
- Any constraints and risks which need to be considered.