

Stratford-Honeybourne-Worcester/Oxford (SWO) - RYR Position statement

Background

- In January 2020, the Government announced its 'Restoring Your Railway programme' and invited MPs, local councils and community groups, to propose how they could use funding to reinstate axed local services and stations.
- Restoring Your Railway includes an Ideas Fund, which provides development funding for early stage ideas to restore rail lines and stations. A bid for SWO was submitted to the Ideas Fund.
- The DfT were seeking proposals to restore lost rail connections, levelling up and reconnecting communities.
- Following discussions with four rail promotion groups, i.e. the Cotswold Line Promotion Group, Stratford Rail Transport Group, the Shakespeare Line Promotion Group and the Solihull & Leamington Rail Users Group, it was agreed to prepare a second round Bid. This was duly submitted to the DfT, by Nigel Huddleston, as the Sponsoring M.P on 19 June 2020.
- On 25 November 2020, the DfT announced that the SWO Bid had been successful, as one of 15 successful bids out of 50 submitted and was included in the National Infrastructure Strategy. As such, the Government agreed to provide up to £50,000 or 75% of the costs of producing a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC), on restoring the rail link south of Stratford.
- Wychavon District Council agreed to handle procurement of the study and tendering, which led to Stantec, being appointed in February 2021, as consultants, to prepare a SOBC, on restoration of the 6 mile missing link south of Stratford to Long Marston and the Cotswold Line, Worcester and Oxford.
- A Steering Group was set up including funding partners from the four local rail groups; Wychavon District Council; Stratford on Avon District Council; Cotswold District Council; Gloucestershire County Council; Worcestershire County Council/ Worcestershire LEP and Warwickshire County Council, together with the DfT, Network Rail and Great Western Railway.

Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC)

- The purpose of the SOBC is to establish the rationale for intervention, detailing the problems and opportunities which the business case is seeking to address. The lack of rail connectivity south of Stratford, serving the proposed Long Marston Garden Village and improving rail access from the Cotswolds and Vale of Evesham, in particular were identified, as well as aiding town centre regeneration. It sets out objectives, generates and appraises an initial long list of options and establishes a shortlist to be progressed for further consideration, to deliver the objectives.

- It does not involve a detailed engineering assessment, or identify overall costs. These are left to a future Outline Business Case (OBC) study.
- An SOBC does not arrive at a preferred option – this emerges at OBC stage.
- The SOBC examines the Strategic, Economic, Financial, Commercial and Management cases, with the Strategic case being the main focus.
- The Government's Treasury Green Book has recently been refreshed to reinforce the narrative around the Strategic Case with a greater focus on the rationale for intervention and with a reduced concentration on potential Benefit Cost Ratios (BCRs). This in part reflects the Government's 'levelling-up' agenda. As such, the strengthened focus around the importance of the Strategic Case underpins the rationale for intervention.
- The SOBC that has been submitted to the DfT, makes the case for a funding ask to develop the scheme beyond that, to OBC.
- As part of the study, the rail groups consulted over 120 organisations, including District and County Councillors; Parish/Town Councils; employers; education; health providers; LEPs, the rail industry and business groups. The consultants also carried out their own programme of workshops with stakeholders and also received written feedback.
- The SOBC was submitted to the DfT in late June 2021 for further consideration.

Next Steps

- If the preparation of an OBC is approved by DfT, further funding would be provided to move through statutory and regulatory processes, including public consultation, environmental surveys, preliminary designs and submission of a planning application, before a Full Business Case would then be provided for the approval of DfT. With that approval, the scheme would then move to the delivery phase.
- A decision of whether the scheme would progress to OBC is expected in Autumn, 2021.
- It was agreed by the Steering Group, that the SOBC report will be published following agreement by DfT, once the decision regarding the project progressing to the next stage has been made.