

OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail

Summary report for consultation

September 2025



Introduction

This summary report of our OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail (the Plan), sets out Oxfordshire County Council's bold ambitions for the future of rail in the Oxfordshire. The Plan is being developed to support the over-arching aims and ambitions of our adopted [Local Transport and Connectivity Plan](#). The Plan describes a vision of rail in Oxfordshire being a central part of an integrated, accessible and sustainable transport system that enables all parts of the county to thrive. It also recognises the imminent and on-going changes in the structures of both local government and the rail industry and the opportunities and challenges this may create.

The improved connectivity the Plan would deliver will help improve quality of life, support new housing and jobs, and drive nationally significant economic growth and productivity.

It focuses on three key themes:

- **Improving connectivity and enhancing infrastructure** – defining the services, infrastructure and operational changes required.
- **Climate action** – setting out how rail can achieve net zero and adapt to a changing climate.
- **Rail as placeshaper** – highlighting the role of stations and rail in shaping inclusive, connected communities.

Oxfordshire County Council is committed to leading the delivery of this vision by deploying its resources, expertise and policy levers. But delivery cannot be achieved by the Council alone. Success will depend on Government, the rail industry and our local communities collaborating with us and playing their part.

This Rail Plan is open for consultation between 3 September and 1 October 2025, with feedback helping to shape the final version that will be presented to Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet for adoption in November 2025.



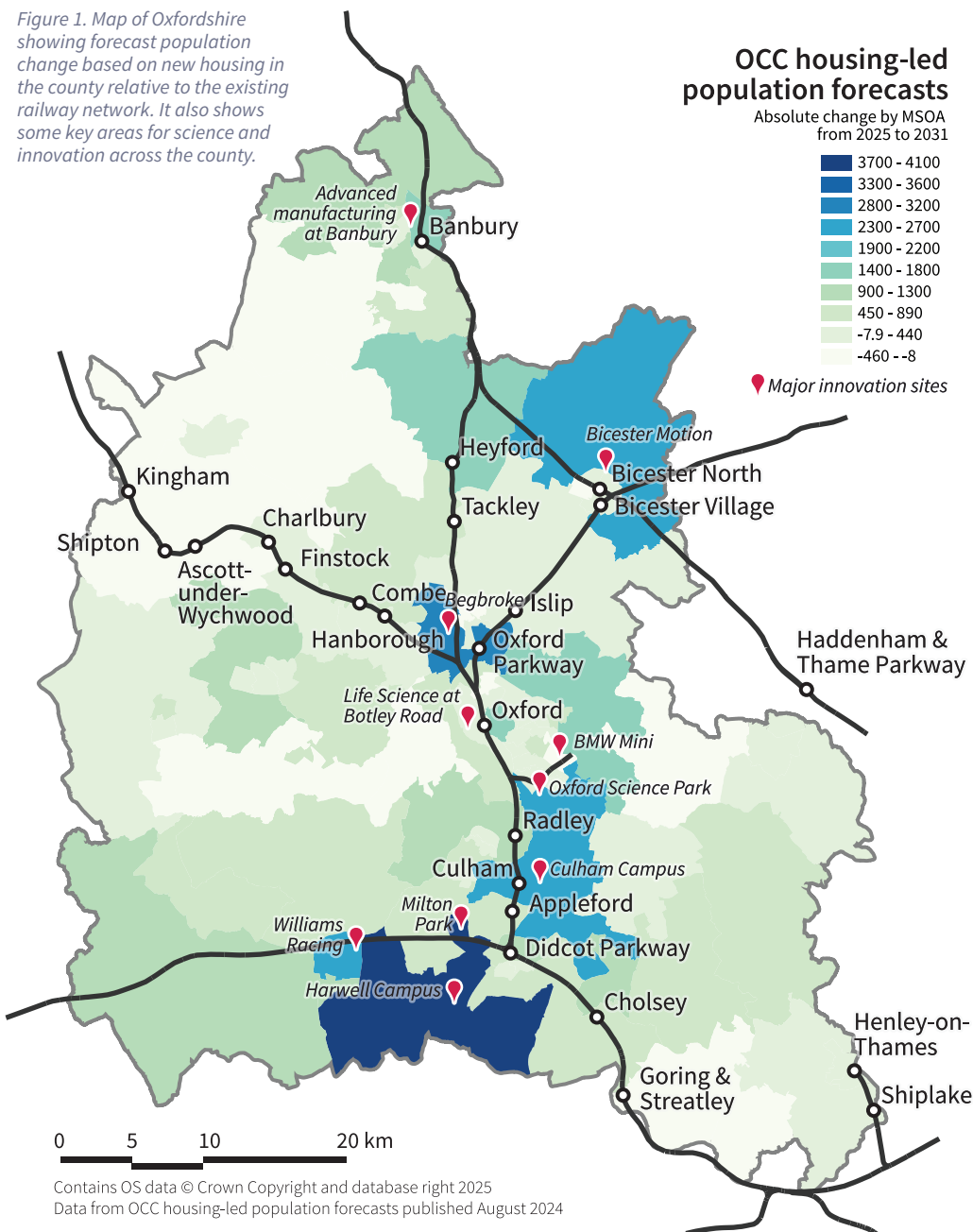
Oxfordshire today

Oxfordshire is a county of global significance. It has a **£24 billion economy** and is home to around **725,000 people and 33,000 businesses** supporting over **430,000 jobs**. It brings together **world-leading science, research, talent and innovation** with a rich cultural heritage and strong communities. Anchored by the University of Oxford and major centres such as Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, Culham Science Centre, Milton Park and BMW Mini at Cowley, it has a uniquely dynamic mix of global research and local enterprise.

Oxfordshire, at the western end of the **Oxford–Cambridge Arc**, plays a central role in one of the most innovative and highly educated regions in the world.

Despite being a predominantly rural county with a rich natural landscape and dispersed settlements, Oxfordshire is home to some of the UK's most dynamic economic clusters that attract investment, talent and ideas from across the globe. These include life sciences and medical technologies in Oxford's biomedical corridor, space and satellite technologies at Harwell and Didcot, and automotive and advanced engineering in Bicester and Banbury. Alongside this, digital innovation and creative industries are thriving at hubs such as Milton Park and Culham Science Centre. The **rail network is central to connecting these communities, businesses and opportunities**, while also helping to safeguard Oxfordshire's environment and rural character.

Initial data from Oxfordshire County Council's housing-led population forecasts show **where new housing is expected, how this is likely to influence local population change, and how this growth relates to the existing rail network**. While projections will continue to be refined, the evidence already highlights the importance of **planning now for the right rail and transport links** to ensure growth is sustainable and communities remain well connected.



Regional connections

Oxfordshire sits at the heart of four major railway corridors, placing the county in a central position on the national network. As shown in the map to the right, these corridors provide vital connections: linking the Thames Valley and South of England with the Midlands and the North, and connecting London with the West of England and Wales. This makes Oxfordshire both a gateway and a crossroads for people and goods moving across the country.

The completion of **East West Rail** will build on this by providing, for the first time, direct services between Oxford, Bicester, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge. This will create a continuous east-west rail link, opening up access to new homes, jobs and opportunities, and supporting sustainable growth across the Oxford–Cambridge Arc.

Oxfordshire's specialist sectors – from life sciences to advanced engineering – also depend on strong **international connectivity**. Access to global markets and inward investment is vital, and this relies on fast and reliable links to major airports. Oxfordshire is well placed with Heathrow, Birmingham and Gatwick nearby, but improved rail connections to these gateways will be essential to securing long-term economic growth and competitiveness.

Figure 2. Diagram of railway in Oxfordshire including wider regional connections



The case for change

Oxfordshire is already planning for significant growth – from new housing and employment sites to nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs), new health and education facilities, and major employment and leisure developments. Without better connectivity, these opportunities are constrained. Congested road networks limit workforce mobility, raise the cost of housing near employment centres, and restrict access to affordable land and workspace. This makes it harder for businesses to attract the investment and talent needed to thrive.

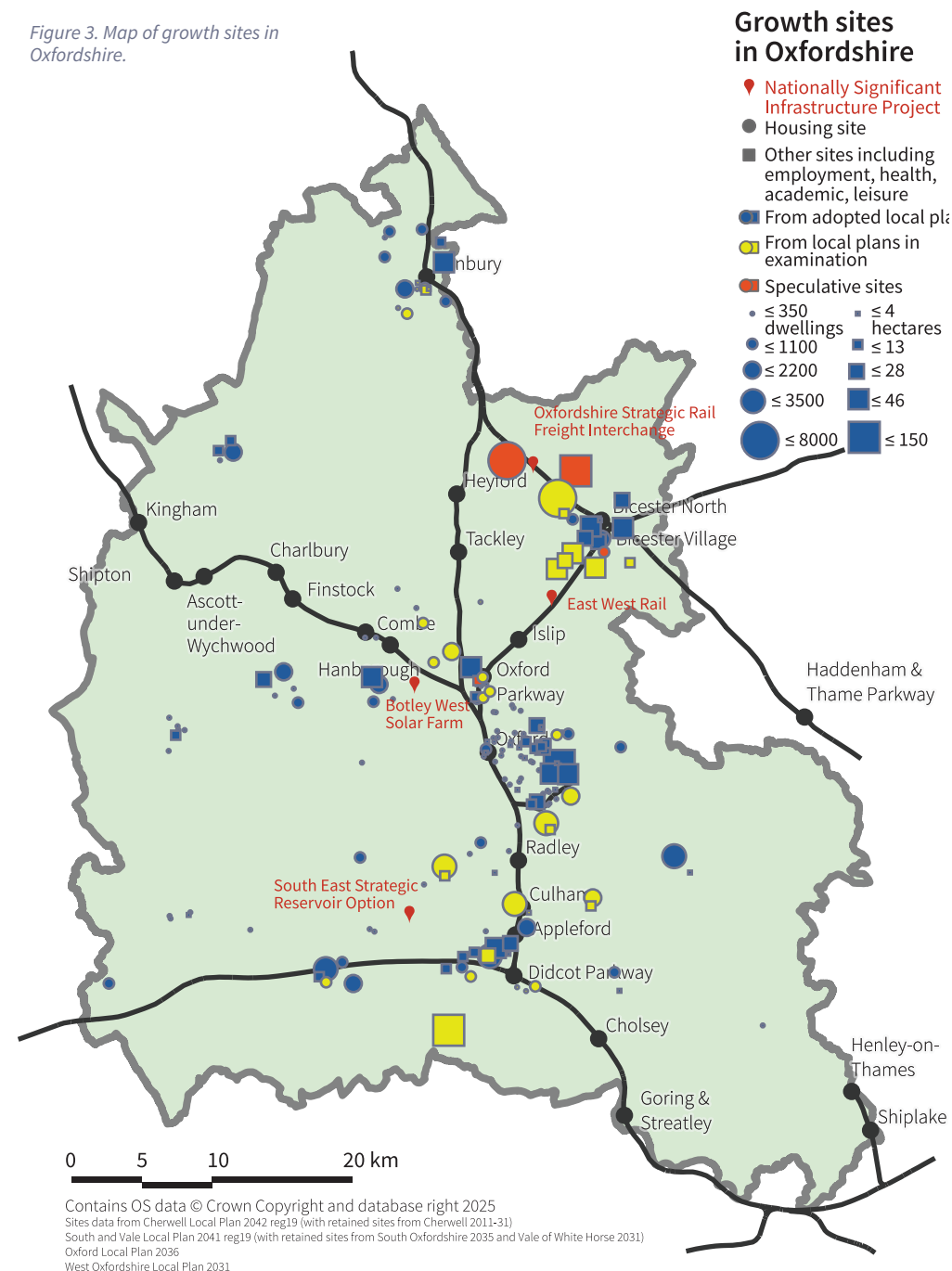
The needs of residents, commuters and visitors are clear: affordable, reliable, sustainable and uncongested travel that allows people to access work, education, health, leisure and tourism conveniently. Businesses require access to labour pools, markets and viable floorspace. A rail system that does not meet these needs risks reinforcing car dependency and limiting Oxfordshire's ability to grow sustainably.

To unlock the county's full potential, the railway must evolve. This means:

- **connecting our innovation ecosystem** reducing reliance on congested and unsustainable road transport
- **supporting knowledge economy enterprises** to maximise their skilled labour catchments
- **attracting inward investment** by removing barriers to major markets and international gateways
- **tackling climate change** by delivering a more efficient and resilient transport system for users
- **offering affordable, attractive, reliable and inclusive travel choices** with accessible options for all, enabling residents, commuters and visitors to reach jobs, housing, education, health and leisure without relying on private cars.

The case for change is clear. With the right investment, the railway can support sustainable housing and major business development, strengthening Oxfordshire's global competitiveness whilst also protecting its environment.

Figure 3. Map of growth sites in Oxfordshire.



Opportunities and challenges

Much of Oxfordshire's planned housing and employment growth is concentrated close to the rail network. This creates both challenges and opportunities: without investment, congestion and pressures on local infrastructure will grow, but with the right interventions the railway can directly support sustainable growth.

Now is the right time to act. More devolved powers through new mayoral authorities and the creation of **Great British Railways (GBR)** provide a unique opportunity to ensure Oxfordshire's railway is equipped for the future. Rail has the potential to unlock new homes, support globally competitive businesses, and ease land and housing pressures by connecting communities through fast, convenient links, with stations acting as catalysts for growth and placemaking.

Oxfordshire County Council needs to work in **collaboration and partnership** with Government, train operators, infrastructure owners, local partners and communities. Our wider strategies – such as the Active Travel Strategy, Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), Freight and Logistics Strategy, Mobility Hub Strategy and Movement and Place Plans – alongside local plans adopted by our City and District Councils, position us as an integrator, ensuring rail is joined up with spatial planning and wider transport policy.

Delivery will require **investment and commitment** – in new infrastructure, modern higher capacity and performance trains, improved and new stations, and the fulfilment of both current commitments and future initiatives. We are ready to work with Government and the private sector to identify robust funding and finance solutions, supported by new powers under Mayoral devolution. With the right investment, the railway – combined with wider measures – can help deliver greater prosperity locally, regionally and nationally.

Key opportunities

- Capitalise on enhanced regional powers and rail industry reforms to shape Oxfordshire's future rail network.
- Use the railway as a catalyst for growth and placemaking, supporting new homes, jobs and investment.
- Integrate rail with wider transport and spatial planning strategies.
- Strengthen international competitiveness by improving access to markets and gateways.

Key challenges

- Securing long-term investment for infrastructure, trains and stations.
- Ensuring close collaboration between Government, industry, local partners and communities.
- Overcoming existing capacity and connectivity constraints.
- Tackling climate change while maintaining a reliable, resilient railway.

Our vision for rail in Oxfordshire

The OxRail 2040 vision is for our railway to be a central part of a world-class integrated, accessible and sustainable transport system that enables all parts of the county to thrive and:

- ensures that Oxfordshire retains its position of significance within our regional and national economy
- enables significant growth and development, supporting new housing and job creation
- ensures that Oxfordshire's growing communities can fully participate in our economy and in society
- contributes to the protection and enhancement of our natural and historic environment.

It will achieve this by:

- **improving connectivity and enhancing infrastructure:** delivering safe, reliable, coherent connectivity to, from and across our County
- **leading on climate action and achieving net zero:** being zero carbon at the point of use, fully inclusive and fully accessible
- **being a placeshaper:** having existing and new stations of the highest quality, equipped for the future and embedded at the heart of the communities they serve.

Outcomes we need from our railway



Enable our economy to grow and become more productive



Support the foundational economy



Properly integrate with other modes of sustainable transport



Support our transition to net-zero



Be predictable and reliable



Be competitive with road transport



Be safe and inclusive



Support and reflect our communities

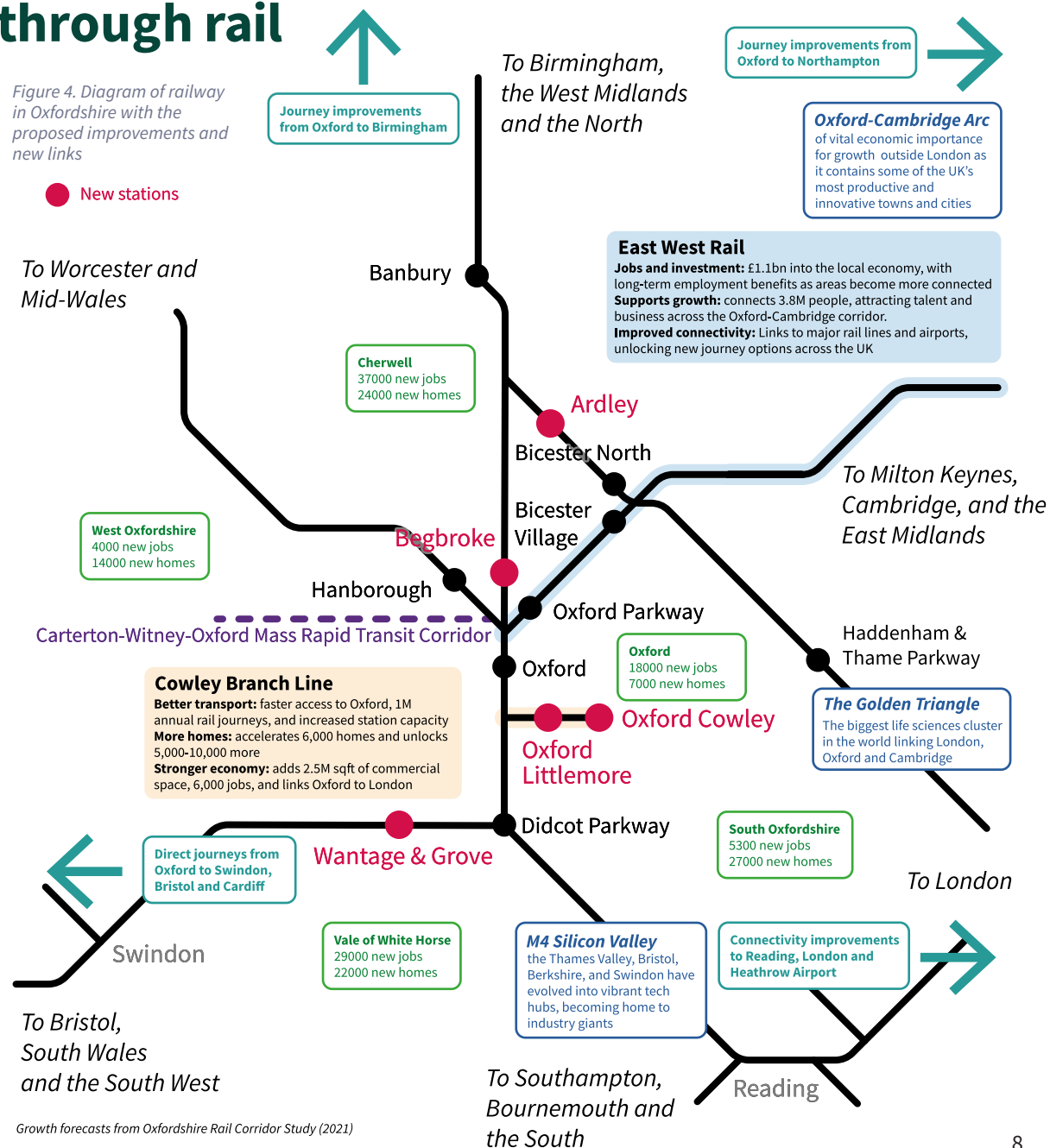
Enabling Oxfordshire's growth through rail

Rail use in Oxfordshire is strong and has recovered robustly since the COVID-19 pandemic. By 2023/24, passenger numbers had reached around **75% of pre-pandemic levels** across the county, and demand continues to grow.

Initial high-level analysis highlights the scale of opportunity. It shows that the OxRAIL 2040 Plan for Rail and its proposed interventions could support or accelerate delivery of around **65,000 new homes** serving more than **150,000 new residents** across the county.

Additional interventions such as the Oxfordshire Metro concept, East West Rail and a new West Oxfordshire mass rapid transit system could provide access to rail stations to a further **90,000 existing residents**. Together, this means rail could serve **over 240,000 additional residents**, supporting sustainable housing delivery, reducing car dependency, and strengthening access to jobs, services and economic centres.

At the same time, better connections to Oxfordshire's innovation hubs – including the **Oxford Science Park, Harwell Campus, Milton Park and Begbroke Science District** – could support over **20,000 additional jobs** across life sciences, technology and advanced manufacturing. Improvements for rail freight, such as new rail freight interchange facilities and the electrification of the line from Didcot Parkway to Bletchley via Oxford and Bicester, would boost local employment while shifting heavy goods traffic from road to rail.



Concept train service plan to support growth

Working with partners across the rail industry we have developed, as part of the OxRail 2040 Plan, the **concept train service plan** shown opposite.

It shows the indicative number of trains per hour at each station that we would like to realise as part of our vision. The concept plan dramatically increases connectivity between **Didcot Parkway and Oxford, onwards to Banbury, and from Oxford towards Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge** via the new East West Rail infrastructure that is being delivered.

This enhanced core service would establish what we call the **“Science Line”**, linking Oxfordshire’s leading centres of research, innovation and advanced manufacturing. By connecting existing and new stations including **Didcot Parkway, Culham, the new Cowley and Littlemore stations, Oxford, Begbroke and Banbury**, it would allow seamless travel between towns and major innovation hubs across the county.

The plan also reflects the transformational impact of the **Cowley Branch Line reopening** and the completion of **East West Rail**, both of which will significantly enhance connectivity to the east and enable Oxfordshire to be directly linked with new destinations across the wider region. Together, these services would provide the backbone of the Oxfordshire Metro, supporting housing delivery, job growth and a more sustainable transport future. It demonstrates how the railway could evolve to improve connectivity and train frequency, unlocking new opportunities for people and businesses.

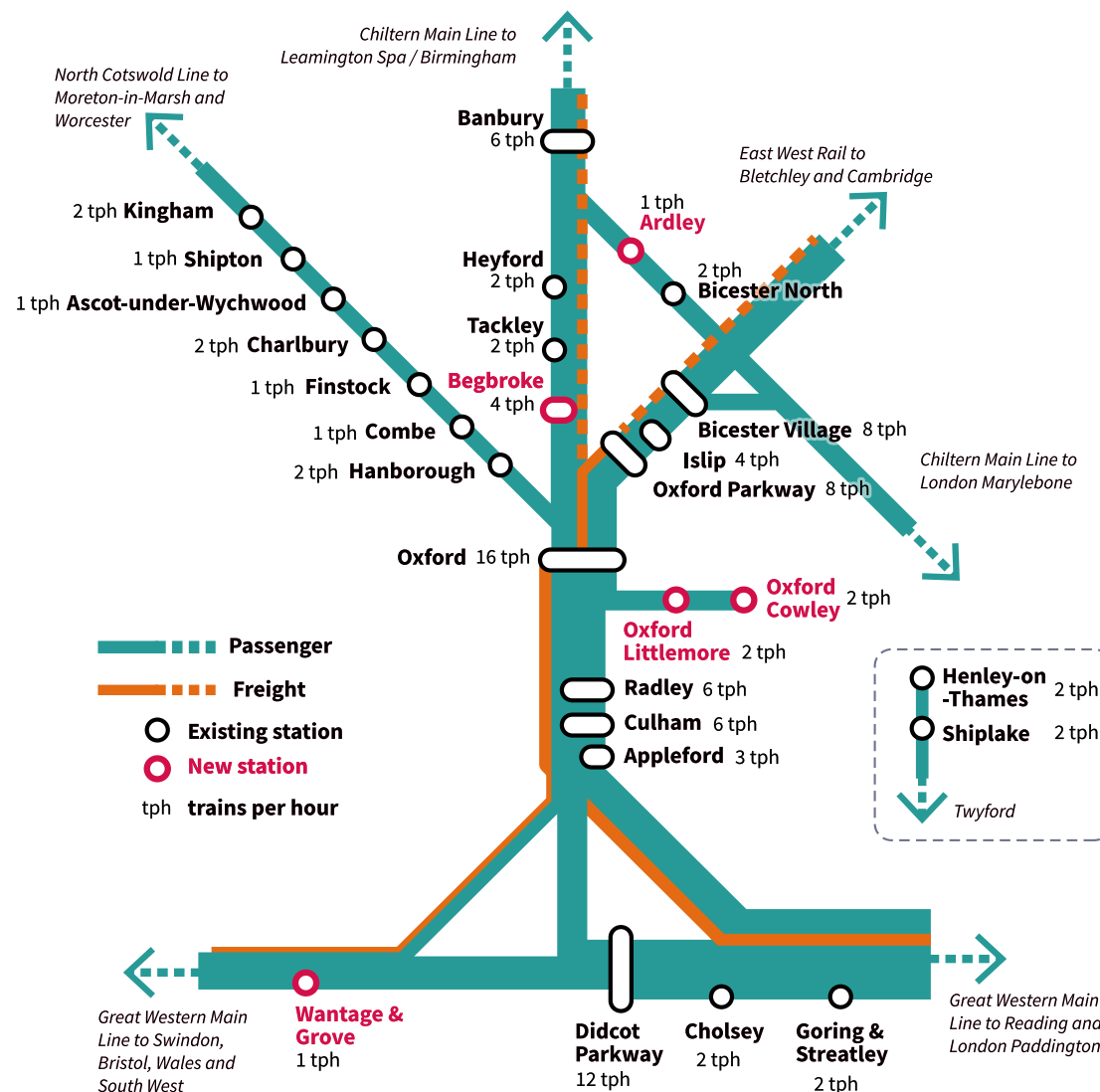


Figure 5. Diagram of concept train service plan proposed in Oxfordshire

Our priorities

The Plan proposes a wide range of interventions, all of which are important to Oxfordshire's future. At the heart of this are four priorities that are critical to achieving the OxRail 2040 vision of a modern, inclusive and sustainable railway. These priorities will deliver the greatest impact for residents, businesses and communities, while other elements of the Plan remain vital supporting components to ensure a balanced and connected network.

- **Oxford Station** – increasing capacity to support more services across the county and redeveloping it into a landmark station and national gateway.
- **The Electrified Railway** – building a zero-carbon network for Oxfordshire, anchored by the Electric Freight Spine.
- **The Oxfordshire Metro** – creating an integrated transport network that brings together rail, bus, walking and cycling.
- **Proposed new stations to support growth** – including new stations on the Cowley Branch Line and at Begbroke, Wantage & Grove and Ardley, alongside upgrades delivered through the Oxfordshire Stations Action Plan.

Together, these priorities reflect the overarching themes of **connectivity**, **climate action** and **placeshaping** focusing investment and partnership where it will make the biggest difference for Oxfordshire's people, economy and environment.

Each of these priorities will be realised progressively through the phased delivery of the Plan, with specific milestones in Phase 1 (2025-2030), Phase 2 (2031-2037) and Phase 3 (2038 onwards). They are outlined further in the following sections.



Oxford Station: A landmark civic space and connectivity hub

Oxford Station is the county's busiest railway station and the gateway to the city. Already serving over 6.5 million passengers a year, this number will grow significantly as East West Rail and new high-frequency commuter services are introduced.

Network Rail is currently working on the [Oxfordshire Connect](#) programme to expand Oxford Station by adding new tracks and a platform as well as other upgrades. This increase in rail capacity is critical in linking not just Oxford but the whole county as it will allow more train services to other stations in Oxfordshire.

Additionally, Oxford Station must match the city's identity, global reputation and sustainable ambitions by becoming a landmark civic space that links the railway with the wider city and unlocks regeneration.

Our vision for Oxford Station

- Deliver a modern, distinctive station that instils local pride.
- Create a high-quality public realm, with green infrastructure, safe walking routes and active frontages.
- Seamlessly integrate the station with the city, through inclusive design, wayfinding and welcoming community spaces.
- Act as the primary hub of the Oxfordshire Metro concept, setting the standard for connected, low-carbon travel.

Integration priorities include

- Real-time coordination with local and regional bus services.
- High-quality walking and cycling connections, including access to the Oxfordshire Strategic Active Travel Network (SATN).
- Space for micromobility options such as e-bikes, cargo bikes and car clubs.
- Smart ticketing, safe interchanges and secure cycle hubs.

How it will be delivered

In **Phase 1 (2025–2030)** of this plan, Network Rail's Oxfordshire Connect project will deliver Platform 5 and a new Western Concourse, improving capacity and the passenger experience.

Oxfordshire County Council will play a supporting role, ensuring the station's redevelopment which includes a new station building and improved surrounding areas aligns with wider transport, active travel and regeneration priorities, and integrates fully with the Oxfordshire Metro vision.

The full transformation into a landmark station and gateway will be realised in **Phase 2 (2031–2037)**, completing the masterplan and embedding Oxford Station at the heart of the city's next phase of growth. Oxfordshire County Council will be key in providing a leadership and enabling role to achieve this vision.



The Electrified Railway: A zero-carbon railway for Oxfordshire

The Electrified Railway: A zero-carbon railway for Oxfordshire will be built on the foundation of the Electric Freight Spine, beginning in Phase 1, delivered in Phase 2, and expanded in Phase 3 to create a fully zero-carbon rail network for Oxfordshire and beyond.

We have a bold vision for a zero-emissions railway, underpinned by an Electric Freight Spine – a continuous stretch of new overhead line electrification linking the Great Western Main Line (GWML) at Didcot Parkway to the West Coast Main Line (WCML) at Bletchley. This would be delivered by 2037, enabling rail freight through Oxfordshire to operate electrically and forming the backbone of charging infrastructure for battery-powered passenger trains.

How it will be delivered

In Phase 1 (2025–2030), Oxfordshire County Council will work with Government, Network Rail and train operators as the industry procures new battery and bi-mode trains, and will support the early design and enabling works for the Electric Freight Spine.

In Phase 2 (2031–2037), the Freight Spine will be constructed, providing full electric operation between Didcot and Bletchley. Targeted electrification will also be required to decarbonise the Chiltern Main Line, East West Rail and the Regatta Line.

In Phase 3 (2038 onwards), electrification would be extended beyond Oxfordshire's borders to connect with other national corridors, ensuring seamless zero-carbon passenger and freight services across regions and delivering a resilient, future-proofed rail network.



Oxfordshire Metro concept: Our integrated transport network

The Government is developing a [national integrated transport strategy](#) and we are keen to lead the way on this front here in Oxfordshire. Our Plan welcomes this opportunity to bring together different modes of transport making it more accessible to more people in the county and we are calling this concept the Oxfordshire Metro.

Developing the concept of the Oxfordshire Metro will begin in Phase 1 (2025–2030) by laying the foundations of a fully integrated transport network, with new stations, improved ticketing and better links between rail, bus, walking and cycling to support housing, jobs and sustainable growth. This will make sustainable travel simpler, more reliable and more attractive for everyone.

What this means for travellers

- **Single ticketing platform** – use of multi-mode tickets and tap-and-go technology across bus and rail, with simple, capped fares and flexible tickets that reflect changing travel patterns.
- **Timetable coordination** – buses and trains running in harmony, supporting key workers and the wider economy with reliable “turn-up and go” services.
- **Seamless travel planning** – a single journey planning app across all modes, with clear interchange information on vehicles and at stations.
- **Longer operating hours** – safe and secure alternatives to the car, supporting people travelling early, late, or for shift work.
- **More frequent services** – making it easier to reach jobs, health, education and cultural opportunities across the county.
- **Consistent brand** – a clear and trusted identity across all modes, so people know they are part of a coordinated countywide network.

How it will be delivered

The Oxfordshire Metro concept does not require re-regulation of buses. Instead, it will build on Oxfordshire’s strong bus partnerships and close working with rail operators. Gaps in provision where commercial services are not viable may require future devolved funding and powers, for example through a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority.

Next steps

Meaningful progress will begin in Phase 1 (2025–2030), with early priorities such as integrated ticketing. Delivery will accelerate as new transport powers and funding are secured, and as rail reform provides Oxfordshire with a stronger voice in shaping the railway. The Oxfordshire Metro concept will form the core of a new model of joint investment and local accountability in transport.



Proposed new stations to support growth

For many communities in Oxfordshire, particularly rural areas, access to rail is still limited. The OxRail 2040 Plan proposes four new stations – Oxford Littlemore, Oxford Cowley, Begbroke and Wantage & Grove – while also exploring the feasibility of a fifth at Ardley. These stations will reduce car dependency, link fast-growing towns and employment hubs to the network, and support sustainable growth.

- **New Stations on Cowley Branch Line** - Cowley and Littlemore – connecting residents and businesses in East Oxford to the city centre in under 10 minutes.
- **Begbroke** – serving the Oxford University Innovation District and strengthening the emerging ‘Science Line’.
- **Wantage & Grove** – providing direct links to Oxford, Didcot, Reading, Swindon and Bristol, improving options for rural communities.
- **Ardley** – being explored to serve Heyford Park housing, new leisure developments and the proposed Strategic Rail Freight Interchange

How it will be delivered

Phase 1 (2025–2030): Reopen the Cowley Branch Line with two new stations at Oxford Cowley and Oxford Littlemore, while progressing feasibility and business cases for Begbroke, Wantage & Grove and Ardley. Launch the Oxfordshire Stations Action Plan (OSAP) to begin upgrading all stations into integrated, accessible mobility hubs.

Phase 2 (2031–2037): Deliver new stations at Begbroke and Wantage & Grove, continue development of a potential Ardley station, and expand OSAP upgrades to embed mobility hubs countywide.

Phase 3 (2038 onwards): Complete Ardley station if feasible and ensure all Oxfordshire stations operate as fully integrated, community-led hubs, supporting long-term growth and resilience

Together, these interventions will give thousands more residents – including those in rural communities – access to rail, helping Oxfordshire to grow sustainably and inclusively.



Figure 6. Map of proposed Oxford Littlemore and Oxford Cowley Stations along the Cowley Branch Line

Reopening the Cowley Branch Line: Unlocking East Oxford

Reopening the Cowley Branch Line to passenger services is a vital step in supporting Oxfordshire’s growth. The south of Oxford is home to world-leading life sciences and technology hubs, alongside major new housing developments. Direct rail access will connect these communities and jobs to Oxford city centre in under ten minutes, helping to reduce congestion, support sustainable travel, and strengthen cross-Oxford links as part of the Oxfordshire Metro.

A business case, jointly funded by Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council and private sector partners, has already shown the scheme would provide a strong return on investment. With Government support, the project can now move into detailed design and delivery, providing a quick and effective way to unlock growth and improve connectivity across the county.

Supporting rural connectivity

Many of Oxfordshire's communities are rural, with limited access to rail and heavy reliance on car travel. Improving rail access for these areas is essential to support housing growth, widen access to jobs and education, and provide affordable, sustainable travel choices.

Our Plan will look to:

- **Integrate local transport** – ensuring rural bus services and active travel routes connect seamlessly into stations through Oxfordshire Metro, so that even communities without a station benefit.
- **Expand accessibility** – through the Oxfordshire Stations Action Plan, upgrading rural stations with safe, step-free access, secure cycle storage, and inclusive design.
- **Support sustainable growth** – reducing car dependency, cutting congestion on rural roads, and ensuring that new housing and employment sites are well connected to the rest of the County.

What this means for travellers

Rural stations such as Hanborough, Radley, Charlbury, Culham, Cholsey and Haddenham & Thame Parkway among others play an important role in their communities. We will look at improving and developing these stations to function as part of a connected web of local interchanges known as mobility hubs.

As part of our integrated transport network, we will also look at providing fast and frequent bus services that connect rural towns without rail stations to the rail network. This may lead to a strong business case for investment in future mass rapid transit provision (which may include rail). By strengthening rural connectivity, the Plan will ensure that growth is balanced across the County and that opportunities are accessible to all.



Our phased delivery

Alongside the four headline priorities, a wide range of other interventions are also set out in OxRAIL 2040 – including infrastructure upgrades, improved accessibility, safety and air quality measures, new freight facilities, and community initiatives. These support our priorities and ensure the network develops in a balanced way that meets the needs of all users.

The phased approach provides a structured and achievable pathway, steadily realising the long-term vision. The following sections outline these interventions in more detail, with the plan on the next page showing how phases and priorities fit together as part of the overall vision.

- **Phase 1 (2025–2030)** – Early delivery, on-going work to increase rail capacity at and through Oxford Station is critical to enabling the subsequent proposals in the Plan including Platform 5 and the Cowley Branch Line reopening and the completion of East West Rail. New stations forming part of the Oxfordshire Metro will be progressed. Air quality, accessibility and rolling stock replacement programmes will begin progress towards the Electrified Railway. We will also begin developing and promoting the case for Carterton-Witney-Oxford Mass Rapid Transit.
- **Phase 2 (2031–2037)** – Expansion, four-tracking Radley–Oxford and North Cotswold upgrades embedding the Oxfordshire Metro. The Electric Freight Spine and renewable pilots advance the Electrified Railway, while Oxford Station is transformed into a national gateway.
- **Phase 3 (2038 onwards)** – Transformation, with full East West Rail, extending electrification beyond Oxfordshire and delivering climate-resilient infrastructure to complete the Electrified Railway. The Oxfordshire Metro reaches full maturity, while Oxford Station and others evolve as community-led hubs of connectivity, culture and placemaking.



Phase 1: 2025 to 2030 - *Early delivery*

Complete Oxfordshire Connect: Preparing Oxford Station for growth

By 2026, work at Oxford station will deliver a new six-track Botley Road bridge and better walking and cycling access, creating capacity for more trains. In Phase 1, master planning will continue to expand facilities and develop the station into a landmark civic gateway.

East West Rail and Oxford–Bristol: New growth corridor links

East West Rail will connect Oxford to Milton Keynes (2026) and Bedford (2030), supporting new housing, jobs and leisure developments such as the Oxford United stadium and proposed theme parks. In Phase 1, the priority is delivering EWR on time and securing a permanent hourly Oxford–Bristol service to link science and technology clusters and cut road congestion.

The Oxfordshire Stations Action Plan: Turning stations into mobility hubs

Stations can do more for the communities they serve. The Oxfordshire Stations Action Plan, launched in Phase 1, will audit every station and set priorities for improvement. This will include safer, more accessible facilities, climate-resilient design, heritage-led placemaking, and an air quality monitoring network starting with Oxford station.

New stations: Building rail-connected communities

Targeted new stations at Ardley, Begbroke, and Wantage & Grove will reduce car dependency and support sustainable growth by connecting major housing and employment areas directly to Oxfordshire's rail network. Ardley would link Heyford Park and the proposed theme park to Banbury, Bicester, the West Midlands and London; Begbroke would serve the expanding Science Park and housing growth in Kidlington, strengthening links to Oxford and other innovation hubs; and Wantage & Grove would give rapidly growing communities direct access to Didcot, Oxford, Reading and Swindon. In Phase 1, new stations at Oxford Cowley and Oxford Littlemore will open while early development and business case work for the other stations will be taken forward to secure their future delivery.

Connecting West Oxfordshire: A Mass Rapid Transit Corridor

Development on the A40 Corridor in West Oxfordshire, particularly around Eynsham, Witney and Carterton continues to put significant pressure on travel by road. Without the development of alternative transport options, increasing congestion will continue to impact on the economy, environment and quality of life.

We have previously commissioned technical examinations of the feasibility of a new railway linking the North Cotswold Line with Carterton. We will continue to develop options for longer term mass rapid transit (which may include rail) for this corridor and will identify deliverable plans and financing mechanisms for its implementation. We will do this whilst working with the rail industry to maximise the utility of the existing railway together with developing mobility hubs to provide sustainable travel options for West Oxfordshire.

Modernising and decarbonising trains

Much of Oxfordshire's network is still served by older diesel trains with limited capacity. Modern, higher-capacity, zero-carbon trains are needed to cut emissions and meet future demand. While electrification between Didcot Parkway and Bletchley is a long-term ambition, early progress can be made with alternative traction technology. In Phase 1, the focus will be on business case development and trials of cleaner, modern trains.

Other interventions

- Integrated station upgrades with spatial planning
- Remote monitoring of assets
- Air Quality Management Action Plans
- New battery-electric rolling stock introduced
- Safer stations programme
- Travel confidence and education
- Cowley Branch Line reopens to passengers

Phase 2: 2031 to 2037 - *Expansion*

High-frequency services: Building highly connected places

Stations can drive growth, but only if supported by frequent services. Current hourly timetables risk reinforcing car dependency. A concept service plan proposes higher-frequency connections on Oxfordshire's main commuter corridors, reinstating Oxford–Cholsey–Goring & Streatley links, simplifying Oxford–Henley journeys, and expanding direct London services. This would strengthen Oxfordshire as a hub for jobs, housing and science investment, while supporting the Oxfordshire Metro. The infrastructure upgrades needed to deliver these services are a central focus for Phase 2.

Delivering new stations

New stations at Oxford Cowley and Oxford Littlemore, due for completion in Phase 1, will transform East Oxford's connectivity, supporting thousands of new homes and over £1bn of private sector investment. Additional stations aligned with growth areas will follow in Phase 2, all meeting countywide standards for safety, accessibility and integration with walking, cycling and public transport.

Upgrading the North Cotswold Line

West Oxfordshire's growth requires better rail capacity. A half-hourly service between Moreton-in-Marsh and Didcot Parkway, alongside London services, would provide reliable connections. Reinstating a second track between Hanborough and Wolvercote, plus a new West Oxfordshire Mobility Hub at Hanborough, would enable this. With preparatory work in Phase 1, service improvements could be delivered in Phase 2, supporting both local travel and the visitor economy.

Freight terminals & facilities expansion

Freight growth must shift from road to rail to cut congestion and emissions. Expansion of the Theale terminal would support southern Oxfordshire, while a proposed Strategic Rail Freight Interchange at Ardley could create a major new hub. Planning and infrastructure development in Phase 2 will balance freight and passenger needs, enabling both to drive local and regional economic growth.

Other interventions

- Renewable energy pilots
- Electric Freight Spine from Didcot to Bletchley commenced
- Four-tracking from Oxford to Radley
- Countywide Station Access Standards
- All stations integrated with bus, walking and cycling

Phase 3: 2038 onwards - *Transformation*

East West Rail Stage 3: Completing the route to Cambridge

East West Rail is expected to be completed by early in Phase 3, delivering fast, frequent Oxford–Cambridge services. This will remove a long-standing connectivity gap in the Growth Corridor, strengthening links between research, technology and life sciences hubs. Completion will unlock housing and jobs, enabling the region to compete and collaborate globally.

Onward electrification

Building on the Electric Freight Spine, Phase 3 will expand electrification to create a fully zero-carbon network. Priorities include Oxford–Banbury–Coventry, Reading–Basingstoke, and the full East West Rail corridor. Alongside this, Government support will be sought to incentivise the rail freight and rolling stock industries to commit to zero-emission traction.

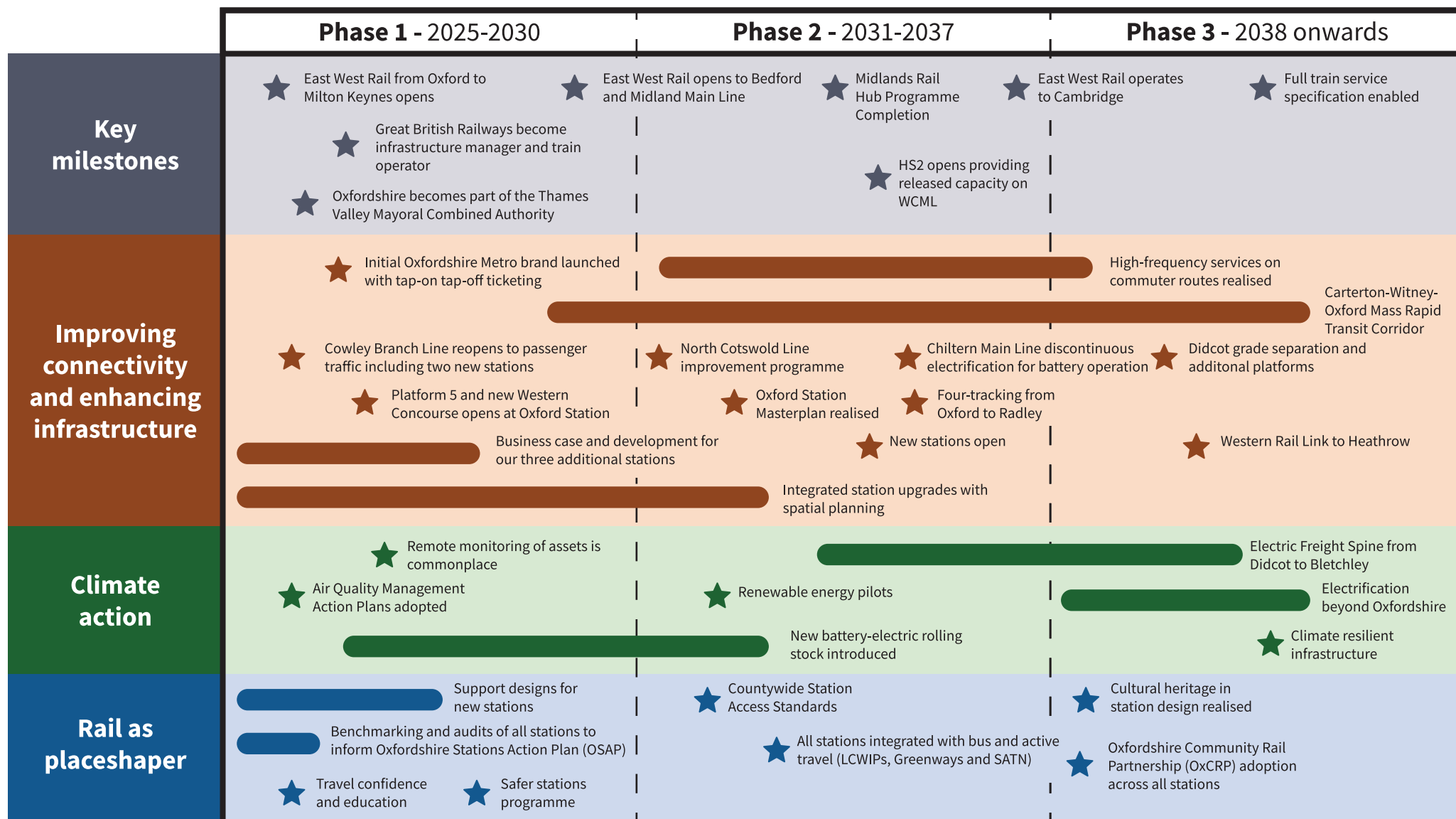
Western Rail Link to Heathrow

Global connectivity is vital for Oxfordshire’s high-growth economy. Direct access to Birmingham Airport exists, but links to Heathrow and Gatwick are weak. The Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH), already in development, would cut journey times and provide fast, direct access to the UK’s busiest international airport. Delivery in Phase 3 would align with Oxfordshire’s wider rail improvements, ensuring businesses and communities are better connected to global markets.

Other interventions

- Didcot grade separation and additional platforms
- Climate resilient infrastructure
- Cultural heritage in station design
- Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership adoption

Our plan on a page



Achieving our vision

Our role in transforming Oxfordshire's railway

Oxfordshire County Council will lead the creation of the Oxfordshire Metro concept, a joined-up transport system linking rail, bus, cycling and walking. In Phase 1 (2025–2030) this includes integrated ticketing, first-last mile connections, new multi-modal stations, digital travel information, and acting as sponsor for a programme of new stations at Oxford Cowley, Oxford Littlemore, Wantage & Grove, Begbroke and Ardley.

The Council will deliver safer, more accessible and more inclusive stations through the Accessible Stations Programme and Safer Stations Programme, alongside a new air quality monitoring network. It will also lead outreach and education programmes to build travel confidence, ensure station upgrades are aligned with housing and spatial planning, and support the transition to cleaner trains through early work on rolling stock replacement.

In Phase 2 (2031–2037) the Council will support the transformation of Oxford station into a national gateway, look to integrate East West Rail into the Oxfordshire Metro concept, and deliver consistent Countywide Station Access Standards. It will also promote walking, cycling and bus integration, support renewable energy pilots at stations, and back the creation of a decarbonised Electric Freight Spine.

Looking to Phase 3 (2038+), the Council will work with communities to embed cultural heritage in station design, expand the Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership, and ensure facilities are climate-resilient, safe and welcoming for future generations.

Working together with partners

Delivering this vision requires close collaboration with Government, the Infrastructure Manager, train operators, local authorities across Oxfordshire and the wider Thames Valley, as well as businesses, developers, universities, community rail partnerships and policing bodies.

In Phase 1 (2025–2030), partnership will be key to delivering Platform 5 and a new western concourse at Oxford station with Network Rail and Government, reopening the Cowley Branch Line with Oxford City Council and private sector investors, and securing funding and approvals for new stations in partnership with developers and district councils. Work with operators will help establish remote condition monitoring, while collaboration with the Department for Transport will be essential to national programmes for rolling stock replacement and universal accessibility standards.

In Phase 2 (2031–2037), joint working with Network Rail, DfT and GBR will be needed to complete full implementation of East West Rail, progress four-tracking between Radley and Oxford, and deliver North Cotswold Line upgrades. Partnerships with freight operators and the private sector will support expansion of the Electric Freight Spine, while collaboration with district councils, bus companies and active travel bodies will ensure integration of cycling, walking and bus networks.

In Phase 3 (2038+), collaboration with national Government, Network Rail, GBR and regional partners will enable further electrification beyond Oxfordshire's borders, resilient asset renewals, and the embedding of cultural identity and heritage in station design. Work with the Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership, community groups and cultural organisations will help stations become safer, greener and more welcoming.

Together, these partnerships will deliver a modern, inclusive and sustainable railway network that supports Oxfordshire's economy, environment and communities for decades to come.

Next steps

This public consultation will run from 3 September to 1 October.

During this period, residents, businesses and stakeholders are invited to share their views on the proposals set out in this Plan. All feedback will be carefully considered and used to refine the final version, which will be presented to Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet in November 2025 for adoption. The Plan will also continue to be refined as new data and supporting information become available, ensuring it remains robust and evidence-led.

This process ensures the Plan reflects local priorities and provides a strong, shared basis for future investment and delivery.

Once adopted, work will begin on the actions set out for Phase 1 (2025–2030), laying the foundations for the wider improvements in Phases 2 and 3.

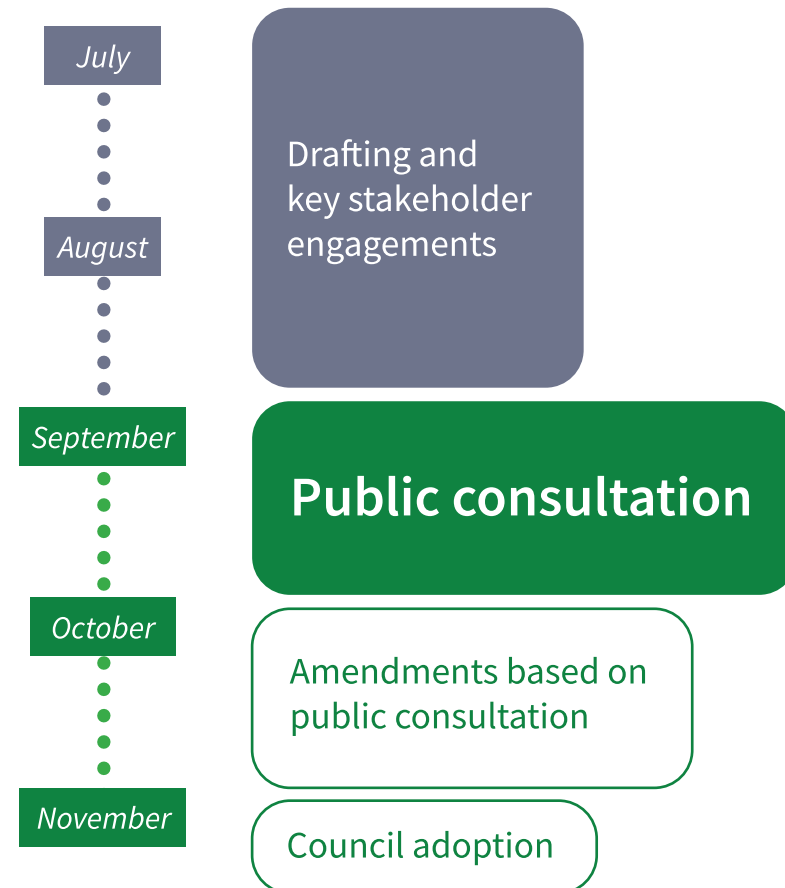


Figure 7. Timeline for OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail

Front cover photos:

1 GWR train at Oxford Station. © Network Rail

2 Chiltern train at Bicester North Station

3 CrossCountry train at Oxford Station © Network Rail