

Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

Date of meeting: 19 th July 2018	AGENDA ITEM NO: 6
Report title: London Road Level Crossing	
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1. Background

- 1.1 The impact of increasing train services to and through Bicester is already having an impact on London Road due to the amount of down time for the level crossing barrier. With the number of trains due to increase further with future enhancements to the train network and services, this is a major concern for local businesses and residents. At the last SDB it was agreed that a Task & Finish Group should be set up to help progress through to a resolution on this issue.
- 1.2 London Road Level Crossing was originally considered as part of the original Chiltern Evergreen 3 project, which then became East West Rail (EWR) Phase 1 (Oxford to London via Bicester). The Traffic & Works Act Inspector concluded in 2011 that an at-grade level crossing was acceptable for that level of train service (2 trains per hour in each direction, now operating) plus the additional East-West Rail 'core' service envisaged to operate once Phase 2 was open (an additional 3 trains per hour in each direction, i.e. more than doubling frequency).
- 1.3 Current "barrier down" times are typically around fourteen minutes in each hour, but vary according to train direction, with longer delays arising from Oxford bound trains owing to the way the line is signalled and lower train speeds over this section. Down times are projected to increase to around thirty-four minutes with the introduction of the core EWR service, expected around 2022. However, alterations to the signalling arrangements currently being investigated could reduce this to thirty minutes.
- 1.4 An enhancement of London Road Level Crossing – over and above what is required for railway operations and safety, which is now in place - is not within scope of EWR Phase 2. There is no funding identified for the scheme, albeit that it features on the "long list" of Oxfordshire Infrastructure requirements to 2040.
- 1.5 It is acknowledged that likely future phases of EWR (with the extension of the scheme to Cambridge/the east when the Central and Eastern Sections come on stream, together with an enhanced service pattern with additional passenger and freight services) will place significant additional pressure on the crossing, significantly extending the barrier down time and delay period. These are not yet committed or funded and are very unlikely to come on stream until at least 2024. **The aspiration date for EWR services operating on the central section is now around 2027.**

2 Work undertaken

- 2.1** As discussed at previous SDB meetings, work has been undertaken by Network Rail, jointly funded by them and OCC, to look at what the options might be for a future grade separated solution, including potential alignments and estimated costs. The conclusions of this work illustrated the significant costs associated with such a scheme – in the order of £45-65m, excluding land and other costs (for example Railway Possessions), which would require further work to establish. Although it is expected that the construction costs could come down through further work, the overall costs would be considerably higher than the above figures.

3 Next steps

- 3.1** A medium – longer term solution needs to be found for LRLC, and this is inextricably bound up with the further development of the railway and the town, so they need to be planned and funded together. This needs to tie in with wider discussions about the future development of the highway network for Bicester. This would significantly strengthen the strategic, technical and financial justification for a Business Case for investment in the crossing.
- 3.2** Network Rail is undertaking an exercise to establish the cost of taking the LRLC options to the next stage of process, i.e. its “GRIP 3” level, which is options selection leading to a preferred option being selected. Within this, there is choice about the scope and level of work to be undertaken. The costs to do the work are being evaluated and will be in a range (to be advised). Funding for this further stage would need to be identified.