CABINET

20 OCTOBER 2026

OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail Update and Delivery Plan

Report by Director of Economy and Place

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**

   a) Note the progress made to date on the delivery of the OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail.

   b) Approve the proposed project allocation set out in paragraph 29 and table 1 of Enterprise Zone Retained Business Rates funding agreed by Cabinet in January 2026 to support delivery of the OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail, including confirming the contribution to the Cowley Branch Line Programme as set out in paragraph 89.

   c) Approve in-principle the commitment of funds to East West Rail mitigations schemes as set out in paragraph 71 and table 2, subject to concluding suitable agreements.

   d) Delegate authority to the Director of Economy and Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, to amend the delivery programme within key decision-making limits to allow efficient delivery and support emerging opportunities.

   e) Delegate the conclusion of appropriate agreements with government and industry partners to facilitate the delivery of these initiatives to the Director of Economy and Place, in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer) and the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Executive Summary

2. OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail sets out Oxfordshire County Council's (OCC's) ambitions for the future of the railway in Oxfordshire, establishing a bold vision for rail as a central component of a fully integrated, world-class sustainable transport network and prescribes the improvements, initiatives and investment required to make this vision a reality.

3. The delivery of the plan was initially supported through a £1m budget allocation, agreed by Council in February 2025. In January 2026, Cabinet approved a further £10m of Enterprise Zone (EZ) funding towards projects across the county that further support the delivery of OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail.

4. This paper updates Cabinet on progress to date on delivery of the priorities in the Rail plan, sets out proposed next steps and seeks authorisation for the detailed allocation of the EZ funding previously agreed.

5. Additionally, the Council holds East West Rail (EWR) 'Works in Kind' funding. This paper seeks authorisation for the commitment of an element of this funding for mitigation measures at Oxford Railway Station and to part-fund the local contribution to the underpass at London Road, Bicester. The total financial commitment required for the underpass at London Road, Bicester is £10m. This paper proposes that the remaining funding contribution will be from held S106 and Capital Contingency, with steps taken to replace this with future S106 contributions.

OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail delivery programme

Background and Context

6. OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail is the Council's long-term approach to delivering rail projects and activities and forms a key component of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP). The plan sets out the Council's vision for rail to become the backbone of a world-class, integrated, accessible and sustainable transport network, supporting economic growth, housing delivery, decarbonisation and place-shaping across Oxfordshire, through until 2040.

OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail - progress to date

7. The Council allocated £1m one – off revenue funding in the 2025/26 budget for rail development activity. This funding has played a significant role in leveraging wider investment in Oxfordshire's rail network and supporting the delivery of key rail priorities.

8. Funding has been used to improve active travel access to stations, progress station enhancement programmes and develop evidence-based business cases that assess the environmental, economic and community benefits of rail investment. This work has helped strengthen the strategic case for future rail funding and investment across the County.

9. In November 2025, Cabinet agreed the OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail. The plan is organised under three overarching themes set out in key chapters:

   (a) **Improving connectivity and enhancing infrastructure**, with the Oxfordshire Metro being the key deliverable
   (b) **Climate Action**, with the delivery of an Oxfordshire Electric Freight Spine

(c) **Rail as Place Shaper**, the key project being the delivery of a comprehensively redeveloped Oxford Railway Station.

10. Delivery against the plan to date is set out below under these three themes.

PROGRESS IN IMPROVING CONNECTIVITY AND ENHANCING INFRASTRUCTURE.

11. **Strategic Outline Case for a new railway station at Begbroke**. In November 2025, the Council jointly commissioned with Oxford University Development (OUD) a full business case for a new station at Begbroke. The Strategic Outline Case is required both to support the expansion of the Begbroke Innovation District and to serve the growing populations of Begbroke, Yarnton and Kidlington. The Strategic Outline Case confirms that a new station is feasible in principle, with no unusual or disproportionate engineering constraints identified. It also confirms that there is a strong underlying economic case, and identifies a credible emerging funding pathway, including the potential to attract private sector investors.

12. **Development of a new station at Ardley**. The Council has completed the initial pre-feasibility study looking at options for a new passenger railway station at Ardley, on the Chiltern Main Line between Bicester and Banbury. This station would serve existing communities and, critically, new development at Heyford Park. An initial pre-feasibility study is an early stage of scheme development. Its purpose is to identify whether there is sufficient evidence to continue developing a proposal, and to understand the principal opportunities, constraints and issues requiring further work. It does not select a final station design or location, determine future train services or commit the Council to delivery of the station. The initial pre-feasibility study concludes that Ardley Railway Station merits further investigation.

13. **Wantage and Grove Railway Station proposal.** A strategic outline case has been delivered which establishes the strategic case for a new railway station in the Wantage and Grove area. The Strategic Outline Case was developed in consultation with the local district, town and parish councils, Network Rail, GWR and Thames Water as the developer of the proposed Whitehorse Reservoir. Subsequent work funded by the rail budget has been undertaken to further strengthen ongoing case-making and project development. This includes:

- Train service timetabling feasibility - development of timetable feasibility for key station options
- Engagement with Thames Water on potential interactions and impacts of the White Horse Reservoir and Wantage and Grove station proposals
- Station location option(s) planning safeguarding - reviewing the implications of White Horse Reservoir Development Control Order limits on potential station sites and identifying land safeguarding requirements

14. **A West Oxfordshire Mass Rapid Transit Study** is underway to assess high-quality Mass Rapid Transit options for the A40 corridor, supporting proposed growth around Carterton and Witney. The Council commissioned a study in June 2026 to assess Mass Rapid Transit options using evidence on current and future transport issues, with recommendations due in early November 2026 to inform West Oxfordshire District Council's draft Local Plan.

PROGRESS ON RAIL-RELATED CLIMATE ACTION

15. **Thames Valley decarbonisation and rolling stock.** Network Rail has completed electrification studies between Culham and Banbury, with related work between Didcot Parkway and Culham being undertaken by GWR and Network Rail. The Council is discussing further studies with a range of partners, including for Reading–Basingstoke and Oxford–Bletchley.

16. SYSTRA has reviewed the visual and **environmental impacts of overhead line equipment in sensitive locations**, including open countryside and heritage areas. The purpose is to facilitate further discussion on the findings with Network Rail, industry partners and other Councils and relevant bodies.

17. **Regional Fleet Replacement Programme.** The Council continues to support the regional fleet replacement programme, which would replace older diesel trains with battery-electric units from the mid-2030s, supporting higher-frequency Oxfordshire Metro services while reducing emissions and noise. Lines and services in Oxfordshire are proposed for the inclusion in the first phase of investment in larger new rolling stock and associated decarbonisation. These plans affect GWR, Chiltern Railways and EWR services. Potentially, some supporting funds may need to be made available during 2027-2028 to help ensure that the industry can press on with procurement, West of England Combined Authority have taken a similar partnership approach recently with a positive outcome in respect of electrifying the Filton Bank.

RAIL AS PLACE SHAPER

18. The comprehensive redevelopment of **Oxford Railway Station**, associated infrastructure and surrounding public realm, is both critical for the long-term development of the City and as the key node in the Oxfordshire network, essential for capacity and service increases across the County. In the short term, investment is being progressed to maintain passenger safety, enhance the station environment, bus and cycle integration, passenger information systems and circulation space. In the longer term, a major station redevelopment programme is being developed through the Oxford Station master planning process, led and funded by Network Rail and the Department for Transport through their property development company, Platform 4. This supports future rail growth, the introduction of East West Rail and Cowley Branch Line services and improved connectivity across the wider Thames Valley.

19. **Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership** support for projects and community engagement activities. Funding supported three key areas of Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership's work: Getaways, Connected Futures and the Greater Henley Feasibility Study. Getaways supported 88 young people from underrepresented and disadvantaged communities in Banbury and Abingdon to access leisure, nature and sustainable travel opportunities, building confidence, independence and practical rail skills. Connected Futures focused on understanding the barriers faced by young people leaving care in accessing employment, education, leisure and wellbeing opportunities, building an evidence base through research and stakeholder engagement. The Greater Henley Feasibility Study explored the potential to extend Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership's community rail approach across the Henley Branch Line and Didcot–Reading corridor through community consultation, stakeholder engagement and socio-economic analysis. This sat alongside a wider programme engaging over 1,200 young people and 2,000 community members.

20. **Improvements at Banbury and Bicester North Railway Stations** have been delivered in partnership with Chiltern Railways. Works included repainting and cleaning at Banbury, a thoroughly refreshed ticket hall/lower station concourse with new seating, and platform improvements at Bicester North, including painting of lampposts, customer information screen posts, shelters and platform line markings. A launch event was held at Banbury station on 30 July 2026 with Chiltern Railways, Banbury Town Council, Cherwell District Council, Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership and the Council.

21. The **Social Value of Rail project** explored how rail can support access to work, education, healthcare, leisure and community life, while also promoting independence, inclusion, wellbeing, sustainable growth and stronger places. The Council convened a cross-sector roundtable with representatives from rail, local government, public health, planning, accessibility, tourism, education, business, community rail and the voluntary sector. The study report will summarise the findings and set out an emerging action framework for rail officers to progress.

22. The **Oxford Railway Air Quality and Noise study**, a collaboration between the Council, the University of Birmingham, the University of Oxford and the Rail Safety and Standards Board, is assessing rail-related air pollution and noise at Oxford and Didcot Parkway stations and nearby residential areas. Using air quality sensors and low-cost noise monitors, it will establish baseline exposure levels and assess the impact of diesel train idling, station operations, electrification and the impacts of different train fleets.

23. The project responds to community concerns and will provide evidence to inform future rail investment, including electrification, cleaner rolling stock, station upgrades and interventions to reduce air quality, noise and health impacts. Air quality monitoring will run for a year to capture seasonal variation; around six months has been completed at Oxford and two months at Didcot Parkway, with noise monitoring now complete.

24. The establishment of the **Oxford Strategic Rail Promoters Group** has provided a forum for key stakeholders to champion rail in Oxfordshire and raise the profile of proposals with government, the rail industry and other partners. The Oxford Strategic Rail Promoters Group has reviewed rail capacity and assumptions within the industry and prioritised measures to ensure that the OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail can be delivered.

The Future of OxRail 2040: Plan for Rail delivery

25. An update on existing spending use and further proposals for the use of retained Enterprise Zone Business Rates to support investment and priorities was approved by Cabinet on 27 January 2026.

26. This included the approval of an allocation of £10m from the retained business rates funding for Enterprise Zone 1 (Science Vale) to enable the delivery of priorities arising from the OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail. Assigning the funding early in the delivery of the plan has enabled the Council to establish credibility with industry, government and local partners and helped generate momentum across the priorities in the plan.

27. The £10m Enterprise Zone retained business rates allocation is intended to support the next phase of Oxfordshire's rail programme between 2026 and 2028. The funding will be used to develop and progress a series of strategic rail projects that align with the objectives of OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail, helping to improve connectivity, accessibility and rail capacity across the County.

28. The proposed outline delivery programme, with a full table of funding set out in Paragraph 29/Table 1. Schemes where the Council's principal contribution is funded through the Enterprise Zone allocation are described first, followed by schemes funded by the contributions East West Rail Work in Kind funding.

Enterprise Zone Funding

29. The below table outlines the proposals for spend by Category. Detailed descriptions of each scheme follow:

Table 1: Enterprise Zone Allocations (£10m)

Category	Total Allocation (£)	Project Breakdown	2026/27 (£)	2027/28 (£)
Strategic Stations	2,872,350	Oxford Station Passenger Improvement Plan*		500,000
		Oxford Station masterplan bespoke work	50,000	-
		Oxford Station Assumptions and Outcomes follow up TA	3,600	-
		Didcot Parkway Station - PACE 2 study of the main concourse	-	550,000
		Didcot Parkway Station - Additional Capacity Public Transport Forecourt	30,000	500,000
		Didcot Parkway Station - Regenerative Pilot	25,000	-
		Begbroke new station Outline Business Case	500,000	500,000
		Begbroke - Level crossing work - Roundham Bridge, other level crossing mitigation	100,000	-
		Oxfordshire Metro infrastructure study phase 1	100,000	-
		OSRPG: Workshop & Technical Meeting	3,750	-
		Strategic Studies	5,000	5,000
Smaller Stations	315,000	Hanborough Station car parking PACE 1 study (Multi Modal Study?)	30,000	50,000
		Kingham Station step-free access Feasibility Study	35,000	-
		Henley Station Forecourt PACE 1 Feasibility Study	-	50,000
		Cholsey Station Improvements	-	100,000
		Culham Station Improvements (PACE 2) Study	-	50,000
Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership	140,000	Ongoing support for Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership (OxCRP) - Projects	50,000	50,000
		Ongoing support for Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership – Contribution towards OxCRP	20,000	20,000
Further Studies	50,000	Western Rail Link to Heathrow Phase 2 Study	40,000	-
		Station Naming Project	10,000	-
Cowley Branch Line	5,018,000	Cowley Branch Line Programme	-	5,000,000
		Cowley Branch Line Study	18,000	-
Staff Resource and Legal	1,080,000	Staff Resource	620,000	400,000
		Legal Support	30,000	30,000
Allocations by Financial Year (£)			**1,670,350**	**7,805,000**
Programme Contingency (£)			**524,650**	
Total Allocation (£)			**10,000,000**	

*N.B. Oxford Station Passenger Improvement Plan funding is also complemented by £1m of East West Rail Works in Kind funding in 26/27, as outlined in paragraphs 59-60.

Strategic Stations

30. **Didcot Parkway Railway Station** Programme of enhancement work in partnership with GWR, Oxford Buses, Network Rail for improvements**,** including:
    - Ticket office, concourse and gate line improvements.
    - Improved station wayfinding.
    - Resolving flooding issues in the subway.
    - Cycle hub security upgrades.
    - Forecourt and interchange improvements.
    - Bus infrastructure improvements including shelters and real-time information displays
    - Integration with the wider Didcot Central Corridor and Didcot Garden Town initiatives

31. In addition, the **Regenerative Stations project** will explore how railway stations can deliver wider benefits for communities, nature and the economy. It will produce two outputs: a county-wide vision framework for regenerative stations across Oxfordshire and a pilot design vision for Didcot Parkway Railway Station, including regenerative opportunities.

32. **Begbroke Railway New Station** Following the delivery of the Strategic Outline Case which identifies the viability of the proposal, the next step is to develop an Outline Business Case. Our analysis shows that there may be a commercially investable proposition at Begbroke and therefore we will develop an investor proposition alongside the Outline Business Case. Through continued engagement with OUD, the emerging approach is to continue jointly developing the scheme before a commitment is made. The Council is continuing to progress the scheme with OUD and discussions are being held to understand the best approach for delivery.

33. Contributing to **progressing Oxfordshire Metro approach, with Network Rail being commissioned to produce a Phase 1 infrastructure study** for the early-stage development of the integrated transport approach. The project will deliver a development proposal and programme for the proposed Oxfordshire Metro approach rail services and infrastructure within Oxfordshire, unlocked by the Oxford station masterplan, rail capacity investment and rolling stock investment nationally. The work will include looking at four-tracking from Radley to Oxford, double-tracking from Wolvercote Junction to Hanborough and consideration of options to address future capacity concerns at Oxford North junction.

34. The Phase 2 element of the work, which will start in 2027, will develop the initial feasibility work into detailed proposals for submission to the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline and Great British Railways Funding Period 1 as well as starting to review the delivery of three important capacity interventions (identified in OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail) in the Didcot area. New rolling stock operating at higher frequencies unlocks the development of the proposed new Begbroke Railway Station.

35. The **Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Promoters Group** commissioned studies will support the Plan looking at priorities for funding and coordinating across the rail industry parties to ensure priorities are aligned and appropriate escalation to government departments.

36. **Ardley Railway Station** The next stage following the pre-feasibility work will need to determine more clearly what role the station should perform and whether the transport, environmental, operational and financial case can support its continued development. the Council will consider doing further work continuing to utilise MHCLG funding (with the potential to work with partners). The Council will also continue to carefully consider any potential interdependencies with the Strategic Rail Freight Interchange proposals. The just published Chiltern Route Strategic Advice and progressing the Regional Fleet Replacement Programme are positive indicators for future delivery.

37. **Wantage and Grove Railway Station**. A Great Western Mainline Strategic Advice capacity study progressed by the rail industry with the Council's full involvement would inform the next steps for progressing options.

Smaller Stations

38. **Hanborough Railway Station access improvement study (North Cotswold Line)** the Council and operator GWR expect the Department for Transport sign-off to secure a long lease on land required for station enhancements and allocated for additional parking at Hanborough station towards the end of the year. Once formalised, the Council and GWR will fund a study to look at transport access improvements at the station. The design study should be complete by the end of 2026/27 and the measures should be in place during 2027/28.

39. **Kingham Railway Station step-free access feasibility study (North Cotswold Line)** will assess options to provide step-free access to the Oxford-bound platform. The Worcester-bound platform already has step-free access, and the existing footbridge could accommodate lifts without replacement. The study is expected to start before year-end and produce a design and budget cost to support a future Access for All funding bid or alternative funding route. Costs will be shared equally by the Council, GWR and West Oxfordshire District Council.

40. **Henley Railway Station improvements** project would be an initial study of potential improvements at Henley station focussed on station forecourt enhancement and sustainable travel access improvements. A town centre access map will also be produced by the Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership.

41. **Cholsey Railway Station Improvements** A programme of improvements is being developed by the Council, GWR and Cholsey Parish Council including:
    - Enhanced and increased cycle parking facilities
    - Improved station user wayfinding and signing
    - Planters and station environment enhancements

- Creation of a walking leisure trail access map for the wider Cholsey and Wallingford area

42. **Culham Railway Station** Progression of work on a **programme of Improvements** involving the Council, GWR and South Oxfordshire District Council focused on securing funding and developing a phased station masterplan supporting major growth in Culham station use. The initial focus is on a forecourt, access and cycle hub scheme, improved customer facilities, blue badge parking and drop-off facilities. Longer term plans include a new station entrance, step-free access and wider expansion to support substantial housing and employment growth around Culham.

Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership

43. **Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership** The programme will deliver accessibility, active travel, heritage and wellbeing initiatives, including station accessibility audits, access mapping, youth engagement activities and support for care leavers. This work supports the Council's Greener, Fairer and Healthier ambitions by making rail travel more accessible and inclusive, encouraging sustainable and active travel, reducing barriers for disadvantaged groups, and improving wellbeing through enhanced access to social, recreational and community opportunities.

Further Studies

44. The **Western Rail Link to Heathrow** phase 2 study will support further development of the proposed rail connection from Heathrow Airport to the Great Western Main Line in partnership with the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and their other partner funded. The Western Rail Link to Heathrow will significantly improve links to Heathrow Airport from the Thames Valley, the South West, South Wales and the Midlands while reducing pressure on London Paddington. The project was first announced by the Department for Transport in 2012 and later supported by the Airports Commission, but progress was paused in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19 on the aviation and rail sectors and unresolved funding contributions.

45. Other studies will include examining **opportunities for station renaming** to enhance community and economic identify with place and increase navigability.

The Cowley Branch Line

46. The Cowley Branch Line is a core OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail priority, identified for early delivery in the "foundations for growth" phase. It will introduce passenger services on the existing freight-only line, supported by main line and branch line infrastructure upgrades.

47. Reopening the line, with new stations at Littlemore and Cowley, will support economic growth, housing delivery, access to key employment and innovation sites and modal shift to sustainable travel. Services are expected to extend

Chiltern's London Marylebone route through Oxford to Cowley, releasing capacity at Oxford station for future East West Rail services.

48. The scheme will connect local communities and wider Oxfordshire residents to central Oxford, London and in future, potentially Cambridge via East West Rail. Over the last year, the project has moved into a delivery-focused phase following the October 2025 Government announcement of £120m support, with work now focused on governance, funding, access, land, engagement, legal and delivery arrangements.

49. The Council's funding will support the feasibility, design and delivery of key day-one access and placemaking improvements associated with Littlemore and Cowley Stations. This includes enhancements to the Cowley Station forecourt and pick-up/drop-off facilities, delivery of a new pedestrian and cycle bridge, associated walking and cycling infrastructure, street lighting, land acquisition, and staff resources required to support scheme development and delivery.

50. Funding will also support a study to ensure that station infrastructure and access arrangements are fit for purpose from day one, inform the design of key pedestrian and cycle connections, and support engagement with Network Rail to secure high-quality sustainable transport facilities at both stations.

51. As set out in the report to Cabinet on 14 July 2026, the Council has committed in-principle a total of £7.5m funding to the scheme alongside an underwrite facility of up to £14.5m , to forward-fund the overall local contribution (if required). Cabinet agreed the contributions of £2.5m from held S106 and general balances in February 2026. The underwrite facility was confirmed in the July 2026 report. With the Department for Transport Full Business Case now nearing completion, this paper seeks to confirm the final £5mof funding from the overall £10m Enterprise Zone allocation, as set out in-principle in the July 2026 report.

52. Alongside City Council CIL contributions and local landowner contributions, this completes the £35mlocal funding package required by the Department for Transport.

East West Rail 'Works in Kind' funding

53. When Government confirmed funding for East West Rail (EWR), local authorities were asked to make a local contribution - either in cash or 'Work in Kind '. Work in Kind allows councils to contribute officer and related costs incurred in support of the project.

54. The Work in Kind pot is designed to reimburse reasonable, project-related the Council effort, e.g. technical engagement, planning inputs, and specialist support delivered 'in kind' to EWR. The Council entered the EWR funding agreement following Cabinet approval in October 2013.

55. There are three main categories for EWR's 'work in kind' funding:

(a) Category A: Time spent by Local Authority Officers providing services to Network Rail that add value to the project.

(b) Category B: Delivery of physical works required for the railway infrastructure, which contribute to the overall success of the project for Network Rail.

(c) Category C: Works on necessary railway infrastructure delivered by a Local Authority, adding value to the project's overall delivery for Network Rail, for example removing the London Road level crossing.

56. The County Council's allocation towards the project was £11m , set in October 2013. This has been retained and is currently identified in the capital programme. As of 31 March 2026, capital expenditure charged against the budget was £1.7m.

Oxford Railway Station and the Passenger Improvement Programme

57. Platform 4, the Network Rail and Department for Transport owned property company, have appointed master planners to design a comprehensive redevelopment of Oxford Railway Station. Master planning, planning consent and business case development are likely to take many years. In addition, work continues to deliver the planned western entrance. However, passenger number analysis and health and safety considerations show that capacity improvement swill be required. However, it is considered that capacity improvements will be required at the station in advance of this due to increasing patronage and new services including the Cowley Branch Line and East West Rail Projects.

58. New Great British Railway compliant signing has been installed throughout Oxford Railway Station, with a £0.4m repainting programme due to start shortly and discussions ongoing on replacing unreliable entrance doors. The Council has also installed real-time bus information screens in the Eastern Concourse and outside the secondary gate line, receiving positive passenger and Oxon4Buses feedback. Highway tracking plans are being prepared to improve bus operations outside the station and near Saïd Business School.

59. This paper proposes to use £1m of EWR 'works in kind' Funding to improve passenger facilities at Oxford Railway Station to manage the initial impacts of EWR services.

60. This £1m will be complemented by an additional £0.5m from the OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail Enterprise Zone retained business rates. This takes the total funding being made available for enhancements at Oxford Railway Station up to £1.5m.

61. This £1.5m will support projects to improve safety and customer experience at Oxford Railway Station in readiness for further growth in passenger numbers including in relation to additional train services such as associated with EWR and the Cowley Branch Line. This could include development of concourse/ticket hall improvements, forecourt improvements or improvements to cycle parking provision.

62. In addition to the Council's investment, the programme will benefit from financial contributions from partner organisations, including GWR, enabling a broader range of activities and outcomes to be delivered.

63. Phase 1 and 2 designs for reconfiguring the main Eastern Concourse and making bus and cycle improvements at the main forecourt will be completed by Spring 2027.

64. Following this a joint programme of investment will be progressed with GWR from April 2027, including stripping out the main Eastern Concourse with an expanded gate line, repositioned CIS screens, a new ticket desk, new toilets and much more circulation space with increased seating and potentially up to nine new bus shelters (from the Oxford City Council commercial contract) installed and fitted with battery-powered Real Time Passenger Information units. Amendments and additions to cycle parking are actively under consideration.

65. Phase 2 of this 'Passenger Improvement Programme' would follow with attention turning to the bay Platforms 1 and 2 and the secondary gateline which will require investment to support the introduction of East-West rail services with additional facilities required for safe passenger movements.

Bicester London Road Underpass

66. EWR's Non-Statutory Consultation in November 2024 identified the need to close the London Road level crossing in Bicester on safety grounds. Mitigation measures are therefore required to maintain connectivity and minimise disruption to residents, businesses and road users in the town.

67. The closure of the crossing creates a significant severance for Bicester, particularly affecting residents in the south-east of the town and surrounding villages who rely on this route to access the town centre. The route also serves as a key link between planned growth areas to the north and south of Bicester.

68. EWR considered two options – a pedestrian bridge with lifts for those walking, cycling and wheeling; as well as an underpass option.

69. However, the Council challenged East West Rail's pedestrian bridge proposal. Its height and ramp requirements would make it inaccessible for many users, particularly those with limited mobility. The reliance on lifts further raises concerns about reliability and inclusivity. Additionally, the bridge would be less

attractive for active travel users and would constrain opportunities for meaningful place-making around Bicester Village Station and London Road - areas identified for enhancement and connectivity – as well as being visually intrusive.

70. As such, the Council considers an underpass to be the only viable mitigation for the closure of London Road. East West Rail are seeking funding contributions from third parties to be able to deliver the underpass solution. If a contribution from the Council is not put forward, there is a significant risk that the overbridge will be delivered, rather than the underpass solution.

71. To secure the underpass, the Department for Transport will require the Council to commit £10m of funding, with most of the payment to be required in 2031 in line with the proposed construction timeframe, although an initial payment towards the design of £1mis required to be made earlier.

72. The Council is currently considering draft Heads of Terms with East West Rail, including clarifying the precise position on any cost overruns. East West Rail are due to provide the final costs of the bridge at the end of 2026. This provides the Council with the opportunity to re-look at the final cost during Budget Setting in 2027. All costs calculated by East West Rail include Transport Analysis Guidance (TAG) contingency allowances.

73. This £10m contribution is proposed to be a combination of East West Rail works in kind funding and held s106. The current funding gap of £2.3m is to be held against Capital Contingency, noting that there will be best endeavours to seek additional developer funding from further growth, as outlined in the table below.

Table 2: Bicester London Road Allocations (£10m)

Source	Value	Notes
East West Rail 'Works in Kind Funding'	£6,000,000	Held Funding in EWR Works in Kind account
S106 (Held)	£1,663,813	Committed funding for this use Agreement number: C/BI/TROT/1 'East West Rail (Various Agreements and Terms)'
Sub-total	**£7,663,813**	
Gap	**£2,336,187**	Hold against Capital Contingency to be replaced by other funding sources as far as possible.
Total	**£10,000,000**	

Funding Summary

74. A breakdown of proposed funding is set out in paragraph 29/Table 1.

75. Enterprise Zone spend of £9.5 million and a contingency of £0.5m is proposed. The budget is allocated within six key categories: The Cowley Branch Line, Strategic Stations, Small Stations, the Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership, Further Studies and Staff resource and legal.

76. The £0.5m contingency provides flexibility to manage changing priorities and unforeseen requirements across the programme, enabling funding to be directed to areas of greatest need while supporting the successful delivery of the overall programme.

77. Total East West Rail Works in Kind Funding of £7m is proposed. This incorporates £6m towards the Bicester London Road Underpass, and £1m towards Oxford Station Improvements.

78. Match funding opportunities are being pursued across several projects within the programme. Potential funding partners include Great Western Railway ,Network Rail, the City and District Council held Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and the Department for Transport's Access for All programme. Any funding contributions are subject to further discussion and confirmation.

79. The delegation at recommendation **d)** is intended to provide flexibility in the use of the Enterprise Zone funding and its allocation against the schemes and programmes set out in the OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail delivery programme.

80. This flexibility is required to manage uncertainty arising during scheme and programme development / delivery and to take advantage of new government funding and commercial opportunities as they emerge. Where a scheme/programme becomes undeliverable within the available funding

envelope and/or funding window, the Director of Economy and Place, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member for Transport, may amend schemes, programmes and funding allocations within the OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail delivery programme.

81. This will help to:

(a) Avoid delays in reallocating and spending the Enterprise Zone Retained Business Rates;
(b) Ensure funding remains aligned to deliverable schemes and programmes; and
(c) Allows for a degree of flexibility within the programme, ensuring that the highest priority schemes are funded and delivered.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

82. OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail supports a wide range of national, regional and local transport growth and climate policies. Key policies include:

(a) The Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor by improving connectivity to support housing delivery, innovation clusters and economic growth.
(b) The Department for Transport's Strategic Priorities and Policies, including delivery of the Strategic Vision for Rail and the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline.
(c) National net zero and decarbonisation objectives through rail electrification, modal shift from private car use, increased public transport use and greater rail freight capacity.
(d) The Local Transport and Connectivity Plan by supporting reduced car dependency, improved accessibility, integrated transport networks and sustainable travel choices.
(e) The Oxfordshire Strategic Plan through investment in infrastructure that underpins sustainable economic growth, levelling up and improved connectivity.

Financial Implications

83. The financial implications are set out in the body of the report which outlines the use of £40.5m existing approved funding across various rail priorities.

84. This includes proposals for the use of £7m of the remaining £9.3m budget on the East West Rail programme, a high-level scope for the utilisation of £10m from Enterprise Zone retained business rates funding and £2.1m from held s106 contributions. The remaining expenditure will be met by up to £4.4m from capital programme contingency held by the Council[1]. However, the expectation is that this is forward funded to ensure the schemes can proceed. The expectation is that the call on contingency will reduce as other funding is identified.

[1] Capital contingency will be used to forward fund the Cowley Branch Line. This is instead of the use of General Balances as noted in the report to Cabinet in July 2026.

85. Further work will be undertaken to explore the use of future s106 contributions and other capital funding opportunities to support the financial requirement on both the Cowley Branch Line and the Bicester London Road underpass schemes to reduce the potential £4.4m call on capital contingency.

Table 3: Allocations by Funding Source

Funding Source	Cowley Branch Line £'000	Bicester Underpass £'000	Various £'000	Oxford Station £'000	Total £'000
East West Rail		6,000		1,000	**7,000**
S106 Held	435	1,663			**2,098**
Capital Contingency (Forward Funding)	2,065	2,337			**4,402**
Enterprise Zone Business Rates Income	5,000		4,500	500	**10,000**
City CIL	2,500				**2,500**
Enterprise Zone Business Rates Income (Forward Funding)	14,500				**14,500**
Total	**24,500**	**10,000**	**4,500**	**1,500**	**40,500**

86. The above table identifies the funding sources being accessed towards the various initiatives supporting the development and delivery of the OxRail 2040: Plan for Rail. Depending on the activities listed in the report, revenue budgets in the region of £3.9m will be established to support the various initiatives being progressed. The remaining funding will be earmarked towards infrastructure proposals and follow the capital governance framework to identify capital budgets.

87. In order to reduce the financial risk to the authority, each scheme will follow the capital governance framework and each scheme cost will be firmed up through the design phase and the allocation of contingency and scheme risks sufficient to keep within the funding envelope.

88. Following the Cabinet report on the Cowley Branch Line in July 2026, the remaining forward-funding exposure is restricted to the Enterprise Zone funding commitment of £14.5m.

89. As outlined in the report approved by Cabinet in July 2026, it is currently forecasted that £12.0m will be allocated towards the DfT delivered element of the Cowley Branch Line programme, this is to fund the shortfall towards the Minimum Viable Product . This is known as the Department for Transport Contribution (as noted in recommendation d).

90. The remaining sum of £12.5m is to be allocated towards the place shaping requirements, including the feasibility, design and delivery of station forecourt pick-up and drop-off facilities, the Cowley foot/cycle bridge, and associated walking and cycling improvements, street lighting, land acquisition and delivery resources.

Legal Implications

91. OxRail 2040: Plan for Rail (the Plan) is an approved supporting document to the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP), which is a statutory document required under the Transport Act 2000.

92. Having agreed the Plan it is appropriate that Cabinet receives reports on the progress of delivery of the Plan. It is also appropriate for Cabinet to consider and as appropriate, approve the matters set out in this report arising from the delivery of the Plan including the proposed allocations and delegations to enable and facilitate efficient delivery of the Plan.

Staff Implications

93. Oxfordshire County Council's Place Shaping restructure has established a permanent rail resource within the Council to support the delivery of the County's rail programme. The initial phase of delivery will be undertaken using existing Oxfordshire County Council staff resources, with additional staffing resource included within the funding proposals for each project.

94. Additionally, the construction of the Bicester London Road Underpass is being delivered by East West Rail.

Equality and Inclusion Implications

95. An Equalities Impact Assessment for this programme has been undertaken and provided alongside this report. The Equalities Impact Assessment concludes that the OxRAIL 2040 Update and Delivery Plan is expected to have predominantly positive impacts across a range of protected and vulnerable groups.

96. Through improvements to rail accessibility, connectivity, station environments and active travel links, the programme will support access to employment, education and services, while promoting social inclusion, health and wellbeing, and sustainable travel. The Cowley Branch Line specifically improves access to jobs and education and enhances mobility for residents in South Oxford, including some of the most deprived wards. The Oxfordshire Stations Action Plan will further embed inclusive design principles across the county's rail network.

97. Potential adverse impacts may arise through the design and delivery of individual schemes, particularly if accessibility, affordability or inclusive design

considerations are not fully addressed. These risks will be managed through inclusive design standards, stakeholder engagement, accessibility reviews, scheme-level Equalities Impact Assessments where appropriate, and ongoing programme monitoring.

98. The Bicester London Road scheme remains subject to the separate East West Rail Development Consent Order process and future Government approval.

Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution implications

99. The proposed funding contributions towards both the Cowley Branch Line and the Bicester London Road Underpass are anticipated to be made following the implementation of Local Government Reorganisation. Any approved commitments would transfer to the successor authority through the statutory transfer arrangements associated with reorganisation.

100. It will therefore be important that funding commitments, legal agreements and associated governance arrangements are clearly documented to provide certainty for project delivery and ensure continuity throughout the transition to the new local government structure.

Sustainability Implications

101. There are no additional sustainability implications arising from this report. Relevant impacts are identified and managed at programme level, including through the Climate Impact Assessment process where required.

Risk Management

OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail Specific Risks:

102. The proposed OxRAIL 2040 Plan for Rail programme is based on a fixed £10m Enterprise Zone funding allocation. There is a risk that inflationary pressures, cost increases, or changes in programme requirements could reduce the scope of delivery. This risk will be managed through regular programme reviews, prioritisation of expenditure, and the use of contingency funding (currently allocated within the budget) where appropriate.

103. Successful delivery of the programme is dependent on sufficient internal and external resources being available to develop and deliver projects within the required timescales. This risk will be mitigated through dedicated programme management, early commissioning of specialist support where required and regular monitoring of delivery milestones.

104. Delivery of the programme relies on maintaining support from key stakeholders, partners and elected members. Changes in priorities, policy direction, or stakeholder expectations could impact programme delivery. Ongoing engagement, clear governance arrangements, and regular reporting will help ensure alignment and support throughout the programme.

The Cowley Branch Line Specific Risks

105. All costs for the Cowley Branch Line are indicative at this stage. Both the Minimum Viable Product costs and the infrastructure and public realm costs could increase so there is a risk further funding would need to be identified.

106. In relation to the Minimum Viable Product, local partners' stated position is that the £35m local funding contribution will be a fixed sum and that any increased costs would need to be met by Government as funder of last resort.

107. In relation to infrastructure and public realm costs, any increase would need to be addressed locally. If costs increase, there would be a requirement to consider approaches to reducing costs through value engineering, delaying non - essential elements to a later date or agreeing further funding.

Bicester London Road Specific Risks

108. The initial proposed contribution of £1m supports the design phase of the Bicester London Road Underpass. Should the project not progress to construction, there is a risk that design expenditure may become abortive. This risk is reduced where significant construction funding requirements are deferred until after the completion of statutory consents, currently anticipated in 2028.

109. The future ownership, adoption and maintenance responsibilities for elements of the underpass asset are yet to be confirmed. There is a risk that Oxfordshire County Council (or the relevant successor authority) may incur ongoing maintenance liabilities, the scale and nature of which will be determined through the detailed design and asset adoption process.

Consultations

Public Consultations

110. The OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail was developed through a comprehensive programme of public consultation and stakeholder engagement. Draft proposals were informed by discussions with rail industry partners, local authorities, businesses, community organisations and residents before being subject to formal public consultation. Consultation responses were independently analysed and used to inform the final plan prior to its formal adoption by Cabinet.

Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place

Background papers:

Climate Impact Assessment: OxRAIL 20240 Update and Delivery Plan
Equalities Impact Assessment: OxRAIL 2040 Update and Delivery Plan
Cabinet October 2013: East West Rail Local Contributions
Cabinet October 2025: Enterprise Zone Funding
Cabinet November 2025: OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail
Cabinet July 2026: Cowley Branch Line – Enterprise Zone Funding

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