

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
THURSDAY 25 JANUARY 2018
GWR FRANCHISE CONSULTATION
REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING AND STRATEGIC HOUSING

(Contact: Giles Hughes, Tel: (01993) 861000)

(The Committee's decision will be a recommendation to the Cabinet)

I. PURPOSE

To consider the Department for Transport's current consultation on the Great Western Rail Franchise and if desired submit views to the Cabinet.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee considers what recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet on the Council's response to this consultation.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. Public consultation on the Great Western Rail Franchise started on 29 November 2017 and runs until 21 February 2018. A copy of the consultation document is attached as an Appendix to this report.
- 3.2. The consultation document sets out proposals for improving train services on the Great Western rail network after the current franchise ends. The Department for Transport is running the consultation to help identify the most pressing priorities for improvements from 2020 onwards.
- 3.3. The Great Western franchise is one of the largest and most diverse rail franchises in Great Britain. It is currently undergoing a major programme of improvements. The Great Western Franchise serves the following stations in West Oxfordshire:
 - Hanborough
 - Combe
 - Finstock
 - Charlbury
 - Ascott-under-Wychwood
 - Shipton
 - Kingham
 - Tackley
- 3.4. The current Great Western franchise is due to expire in March 2019. The Department for Transport considers that a change of franchise operator is best avoided at this time, as it falls in the midst of a major programme of change. Instead they consider that there is significant benefit, both for passengers and for taxpayers, in allowing a short period for the new trains and timetables to bed in before we they commence the competition for a new long-term franchise. The Department of Transport therefore intend to exercise their contractual option to extend the current franchise for a further twelve months, and to begin discussions with the current franchise operator with a view to them continuing to operate the franchise for a further two years – i.e. until March 2022.

- 3.5. The consultation document states that demand for travel across the Great Western franchise has grown substantially in recent years – faster than the rail industry was expecting five or ten years ago, and that there are good reasons to expect passenger numbers to continue growing significantly during the 2020s.
- 3.6. The consultation document proposes the following core objectives for the Great Western franchise in the 2020s:
- **Provide safe, punctual and reliable services** with enough seats and space for people who want to use them;
 - **Focus on the needs of the travelling public** to provide an excellent and continually-improving customer experience for all passengers, whatever their particular needs and abilities;
 - **Maximise the benefits for passengers** from the current transformational investment in the Great Western railway network;
 - **Maximise the contribution of the railway to driving local and regional economic growth**, enabling planned growth in housing, and meeting the wider needs of citizens and society across the whole of the franchise area;
 - **Be a responsible employer** who invests in the welfare and the development of its workforce, motivating staff and equipping them with the right skills to provide the best possible customer service;
 - **Strengthen the connection between the railway and the communities it serves**, supported by strong relationships with all those who have an interest in the franchise and the services it provides;
 - **Continue to improve the environmental performance of the railway** and support wider environmental objectives by providing an attractive alternative to more polluting modes, and improving measures such as energy and water consumption and recycling;
 - **Develop close collaborative working with Network Rail and other partners**, bringing the operation of track and train closer together to deliver the best possible service for passengers and drawing in funding from the widest possible range of sources;
 - **Work with the Government and other agencies to support the development and delivery of other major rail investment schemes**, such as the proposed western rail link to Heathrow, East-West Rail and the interface with HS2 at Old Oak Common; and
 - **Operate efficiently, providing best value for taxpayers' and passengers' money**, thereby ensuring the maximum possible resources are available for further service improvements.
- 3.7. The consultation document considers some different approaches that might be taken towards the next franchise in order to provide the best possible service for passengers and value for taxpayers, through the 2020s. It identifies three key issues:
- Should Great Western be retained as a single franchise, in essentially its current form, or split into two (or more) separate franchises?
 - How can Government better integrate the activities of the franchisee (as train operator) and Network Rail (as network operator), to ensure that both parties work collaboratively to common objectives that put passengers' interests first?
 - When is the best time to embark upon a competition for a new, long-term franchise?

- 3.8. The consultation document also sets out 18 more detailed questions. Of particular relevance to West Oxfordshire is question 5, which asks which routes could benefit from improvements, and question 14, which asks about the priorities for stations in the franchise.
- 3.9. The consultation document also refers to the North Cotswold Line Task Force, which draws together local authorities and other partners with an interest in the North Cotswold route between Oxford, Worcester and Hereford. The Task Force aims to develop proposals for faster and more frequent journeys to and from London.
- 3.10. A consultation response provides an opportunity for the Council to make the case for improvements to train frequencies and train times on the North Cotswold Line for example. A response can also advocate for further improvements in car parking, and identify the need for measures to enhance pedestrian/ cyclist accessibility and connectivity with other forms of public transport.

4. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS

The Council can choose whether it wishes to respond to this consultation on the Great Western Rail Franchise.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications from responding to the consultation.

6. RISKS

There is a reputational risk to the Council if it does not respond constructively to the consultation. Otherwise there are no other direct risks.

7. REASONS

A consultation response can support the Council's ability to protect and enhance the environment of West Oxfordshire and maintain the district as a clean, beautiful place with low levels of crime and nuisance. It will also support the Council's ability to work in partnership to sustain economically prosperous towns and villages with full employment.

Giles Hughes
Head of Planning & Strategic Housing

(Author: Giles Hughes, Tel: (01993) 861000; email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk)
Date: 15 January 2018

Background Papers:
None