Swindon-Didcot-Oxford 'Call for Evidence' Analysis
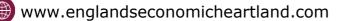*April 2022*

1. Context

1.1. England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is undertaking a series of connectivity studies.

1.2. The third of the studies underway is the Swindon-Didcot-Oxford (Sw-Di-Ox) study.

1.3. As part of the evidence gathering stage, a public 'call for evidence' was undertaking, spanning March 2022 (7th – 28th March). The call for evidence was made public on the EEH website here and promoted specifically to 'tier 3' stakeholders; those stakeholders with an interest in the study but not involved in either the steering or stakeholder groups.

1.4. Four questions were asked as part of the study, each with the opportunity to provide feedback in free text.

1.5. The 4 questions posed were:

- What are the key themes for the study area?

- What do you consider to be the key movements in the area?

- What are the key connectivity challenges and opportunities in the area?

- What interventions do you think the study should consider?

1.6. 21 people or organisations responded to the call for evidence (either via the online survey or through email). 11 were residents, 9 were organisations or interest groups and 1 was an elected member or MP.

1.7. This report gives an overview of the outputs from the call for evidence.

2. Question 1 – Key themes

2.1. The first survey question asked respondents what they felt the most important themes to consider within the study were.

2.2. The 3 most common themes identified as important were:

- Decarbonisation / net zero

- Accessibility by and use of non-car modes

- Environmental protection / enhancement

2.3. There were further strong themes emerging in question 1, which included the decarbonisation of rail / rail freight; general improved connectivity; digital connectivity; public transport (particular focus on rail) improvements; road network improvements; new railway stations and car dependency / congestion.

2.4. Other themes which were noted by respondents were:

- Electrification of rail;

- Improved coordination between local authorities;

- Sustainability;

- Bus service improvements

- Mass Rapid Transit;

- Connecting residential areas to employment areas sustainably;

- Reducing the need to travel;

- Levelling-up;

- Rural transport;

- Cost of public transport;

- Mental health and wellbeing;

- Following appropriate guidance;

- Adaptation to climate change;

- Future forecasting; and

- Safety

2.5. Below are some quotes or extracts from survey responses:

- '*Improving access to employment for those without a car*';

- '*It is vital that all interventions are sensitive to the need to protect the countryside and its landscape*';

- '*High levels of car traffic in central Oxfordshire*';

- '*The A420 from… Farringdon towards Kingston Bagpuize is not the kind of road that most would consider walking, taking a horse, or cycling upon*'; and

- '*Development of rail and linked public transport systems to provide genuine convenient and affordable alternatives to car travel*'.

🌐 www.englandseconomicheartland.com   🐦 @EconomicHeart
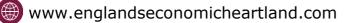
3. Question 2 – Key movements

3.1. The second question in the survey asked what were considered key movements and who was making the movements.

3.2. The question on key movements was answered in 2 ways – specific corridor movements and types of movements. The breakdown for each type of response is considered below.

3.3. The most common responses to the key movements question were:

- Long distance and inter-urban travel;

- Trips to / from and around the towns and cities; and

- Direct rail service between Oxford-Didcot-Swindon (future movement).

3.4. The most highly mentioned specific movements were:

- To / from Oxford;

- To / from Swindon;

- To / from Didcot;

- To / from Harwell Campus;

- A34 route; and

- To / from London.

3.5. There were additional routes or key origins/destinations highlighted which included the A420, M4, Wantage and Grove, Bristol, Swindon - Oxford, movements for employment/education/shopping and leisure, freight traffic routes and trips between rural areas, amongst others.

3.6. Below are some quotes or extracts from survey responses which also raised some opportunities that are available to accommodate desired movements:

- '*Oxford Didcot is essentially local commuting but overlaid by Oxford London demands. We feel the suppression of Oxford London commuting, especially on rail, should be a key objective to free up capacity*';

- '*There are gaps in the National Cycleway Network which could be covered with a good cycleway along the Wilts & Berks Canal towpath*';

- '*The lack of a railway station between Didcot and Swindon severely restricts the usefulness of the train to local people. This is compounded by the difficulty of getting into Swindon by car (or other means) to access the station there*'; and

- '*Connectivity between Oxford-Swindon not good (involves change if travelling by rail, due to lack of through services)*'.

4.   Question 3 – Opportunities and Challenges
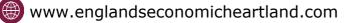
4.1.   Question 3 asked for the opportunities and challenges related to connectivity in the study geography.

4.2.   The most frequently mentioned opportunities are;

- A railway station at Grove;
- Utilising new technologies, non-car modes and renewables etc. to achieve decarbonisation targets;
- Freight consolidation hubs (especially for rail);
- Direct rail services only stopping at Oxford, Didcot and Swindon;
- East-West Rail; and
- Putting people and the environment at the centre of decision-making.

4.3.   The most frequently mentioned challenges were:

- Delays on and poor quality of the A420;
- Climate change and environmental impact;
- Non-car connectivity to major employers is very poor;
- Need to increase capacity of the rail network;
- Electrification of the rail network;
- Much of the 'A' road network is not capable of handling the increased traffic being generated by new developments; and
- Lack of joined up relationship between Local Authorities.

4.4.   Below are some quotes from survey responses received:

- '*There is a substantial carbon footprint associated with expecting vehicles to use M4 / A34 instead of the A420 between Swindon & Oxford (having much of A420 with a 50 mph speed limit is fine - it's still quicker than the long way round, provided the traffic keeps moving)*';
- '*Reinstating a station at Grove would provide rail access both for the growing population of Wantage & Grove and for the surrounding villages as well*';
- '*Oxford station is a massive bottleneck on the rail network*';
- '*The challenges are to plan for growth both for local flows and the longer distance movements and to achieve modal shift away from road traffic to more sustainable rail and reducing car volumes in favour of greater use of public transport*';
- '*Increased use of rail freight leads to reduced carbon emissions, less congestion on the roads and a reduction in traffic noise*';
- '*The challenge is that many of the existing interconnecting A-roads simply do not have enough space to add cycle lanes*'; and
- '*Ensuring that the climate crisis is not exacerbated further by new and existing transport routes*'.

www.englandseconomicheartland.com   @EconomicHeart

5. Question 4 - Interventions

5.1. Question 4 asked for potential interventions to consider as part of the study development. Again, this question was answered in 2 different ways – location specific interventions and themes.

5.2. The most commonly mentioned thematic interventions were:

- Public transport (particularly rail);
- Active travel;
- Freight travel; and
- Electric vehicles.

5.3. The most common location specific interventions were:

- New railway station at Grove;
- Increasing rail network capacity (including 4-track capacity);
- East-West Rail;
- Rail freight hubs / consolidation centres / interchanges;
- Improving the A420 route;
- Direct rail services between Oxford, Didcot and Swindon;
- Electric vehicle charging locations;
- Electrification of the rail network;
- New and improved existing cycle routes;
- Intensification of passenger services on the 'spine line' through central Oxfordshire; and
- Reopening of the Cowley branch line.

5.4. Where highly ranking thematic interventions were mentioned, they were often accompanied by examples, these tended to be specific to the location of the person or organisation responding and therefore did not rank highly in the most common location specific interventions. For example, *'Demand-responsive bus services serving Didcot and surrounding villages to connect with Harwell Campus and Didcot Parkway'*.

5.5. Below are some quotes from survey responses received:

- 'The provision of direct rail services from Oxford to Swindon (and Bristol beyond) via Didcot, splitting services between fast non-stop direct trains and local services';
- 'any initiative which promotes active travel and/ or a switch to a more environmentally friendly mode of travel';
- 'Further road dualling should be limited to pinch points, and not undertaken where rapid transit offers an alternative';
- 'Extending East-West rail through Oxford to Didcot, Swindon and Bristol.'; and

🌐 www.englandseconomicheartland.com　　　　　🐦 @EconomicHeart

- 'The reinstatement of a station at Grove between Didcot and Swindon. This should also become a transport hub in its own right, with additional bus services and car and cycle parking'.

6. Survey representation

6.1. The 'call for evidence' was open to the public and promoted specifically to interest groups, national groups, Parish Councils, business groups, universities, places of strategic importance (as outlined in the Transport Strategy), housing developers, key tourist attractions and transport groups.

6.2. In the case of the Sw-Di-Ox Call for evidence it should be noted that more responses were received from Oxfordshire and those in the Swindon area. This may have impacted the prevalence of location specific interventions suggested during the call for evidence.

www.englandseconomicheartland.com   @EconomicHeart